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A HISTORY OF THE

Baptists of Oak Ridge, Louisiana

BAPTISTS OF OAK RIDGE

GLENLEIGH PRESS, INC.

THE BAPTISTS OF OAK RIDGE
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A HISTORY OF THE
Baptists of Oak Ridge, Louisiana

1797-1960

By

GLEN LEE GREENE, Th.D.

THE PARTHENON PRESS
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1960

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This book was written with a desire, for one of the reasons that any book is written, to call a book. I could have written a book on a subject as wide as this, but the subject is difficult to understand and extremely serious. I have, however, written a book I consider to be good and sufficient presentation of the subject.

Finally, after a series of trials, a seven year search for law or history, or any other subject, I have the subject of this book, perhaps, in a better position for consideration.

For my wife and children

Grace, Glen, Jr., Roxie, and Jerry

and to honor
how a very important man, Mr. John W. Stroh, when
the church was organized, was the first to be asked and
willing to set up a congregation for the observance of what
was then believed to be the church's hundredth anniversary
in 1957. I was asked to prepare a book to record the
facts and results of the work. I believe this book will be a good
historical contribution, especially to the people of the area.

After thorough research, I have found no previous
historical data in any book or article on this subject.
My aim and purpose is to make the book as accurate as
possible. In the course of my research, several pieces of
information were found on how various men approached
Christian basis of democracy and equality. I have
not referred to this section, but it is the opinion that the church
must have existed in the community as early as 1860
and possibly as early as 1850. Such a date has never
before appeared in the writings of Louisiana Baptist historians.
The purpose of this book is to record the history of the
church, and to honor the men who have served it.

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1905-1906

PREFACE

This book was written partly, I admit, for one of the reasons that any book is written: I wanted to write a book. I could have rationalized my desire in a variety of ways, but the urge to do that—an entirely human and universally known urge—was happily obviated when I stumbled upon good and sufficient justification for the volume.

Shortly after I came to Oak Ridge seven years ago, my love of history prompted me to investigate the origin of the church, particularly the date of its organization. A cursory examination of the records revealed that the Minutes of the association for many years had listed 1857 as the date of the church's organization. No one in the church seemed to know how or why this date was chosen; none actually knew when the church was organized. Nevertheless, a centennial committee was set up to make plans for the observance of what was then believed to be the church's hundredth anniversary in 1957. I was asked to prepare a brief historical sketch. Preliminary results of the early investigation made the proposed centennial anachronous; consequently, it was not held.

More thorough subsequent research turned up perhaps half a dozen dates in various documents, all of them contradictory and purporting to show when the church was organized. In the course of careful study, which proved all of these dates in error, important new sources were uncovered. On the basis of documentary and presumptive evidence, I was led inferentially to the conviction that a Baptist church must have existed in the vicinity at least as early as 1804 and possibly as early as 1797. Such findings have never before appeared in the writings of Louisiana Baptist historians. The purpose of this volume, therefore, is to present an authentic account of the history of Oak Ridge Baptists and to in-

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dicate new sources which may prove useful to contemporary and future historians.

The fundamental structure and basic evidence of this volume rest upon primary sources. Critical points have been fully documented; in other areas I have exercised my discretion. Although I have followed, sometimes painfully, the critical and exacting standards of historical research, I offer no assurance that the book is free of bias. Unbiased persons do not write books; at least, I have never read an unbiased book. The selections of materials included or emphasized naturally reflect to some extent my limitations, my judgments of what is good or valuable. Thus my philosophy, my character, and a part of my being have been partially but inevitably projected in the volume. Some readers may complain that I have dwelled too much on background, or that I have given disproportionate attention to the early years or to biographical data. I anticipate criticism. That is good. I welcome it. But "what I have written I have written." I refer my critics to my sources and to God, who made me—if that helps any.

So many persons have offered encouragement and assistance in the assembling of materials for, and in the publication of, this work that even the naming of them would be a formidable undertaking. I shall always be indebted to the members of Oak Ridge Baptist Church for their consistent understanding, their readiness to furnish necessary expenses, and their enthusiastic cooperation, without which the task could never have been completed. The April, 1937, issue (Vol. XX) of *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly* proved extremely useful and made the work incalculably easier. Librarians at numerous public libraries offered uniformly courteous assistance, as did those at various Baptist institutions and agencies. I am especially indebted to Miss Nelle C. Davidson, Librarian at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, whose assistance exceeded the normal call of duty.

PREFACE

Officials and employees at the courthouses in Bastrop and Monroe deserve particular recognition, for they allowed me to browse through musty old records to my heart's content. Lessie Madison Garrett, Eva Loe McDuffie, Mrs. J. D. Reese, Gertrude Rolfe White, Beulah B. Williams, and many others extended courtesies which I must acknowledge. I am grateful to Mrs. Vester R. Headrick, Instructor in Secretarial Science at Northeast Louisiana State College, and to one of her students, Miss Martha Kay Parish, who jointly accepted responsibility for the typing of the manuscript and who deciphered very nearly illegible handwritten corrections in the copy furnished them. While I appreciate the helpfulness of all who contributed to the book, I must rightfully assume responsibility for the story as it has been told, for the decisions made, and for any errors the work may contain.

It seemed fitting to dedicate this volume to my wife and children. They have suffered patiently through my neglect of them, my general preoccupation with my work, and my foibles and faults—admitted and unadmitted.

I trust that this volume may contribute something toward a better understanding of the history of Louisiana Baptists and of the history of Northeast Louisiana. I hope that it will inspire the churches to keep better records and to make a more diligent effort to preserve their records. If such results could follow in even a small way, the efforts represented by this book will not have been in vain.

GLEN LEE GREENE
Oak Ridge Baptist Church
Oak Ridge, Louisiana
January 15, 1960

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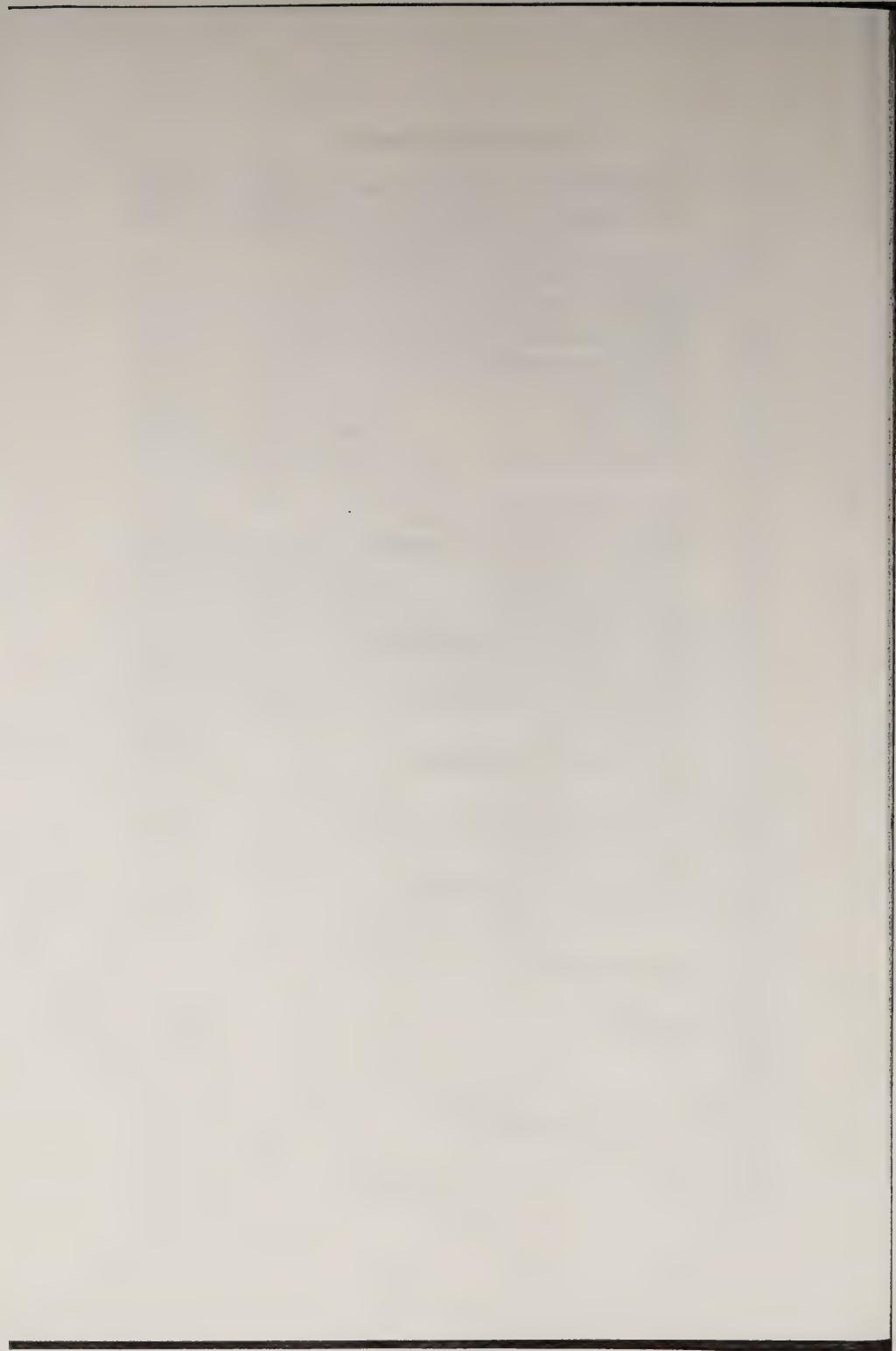
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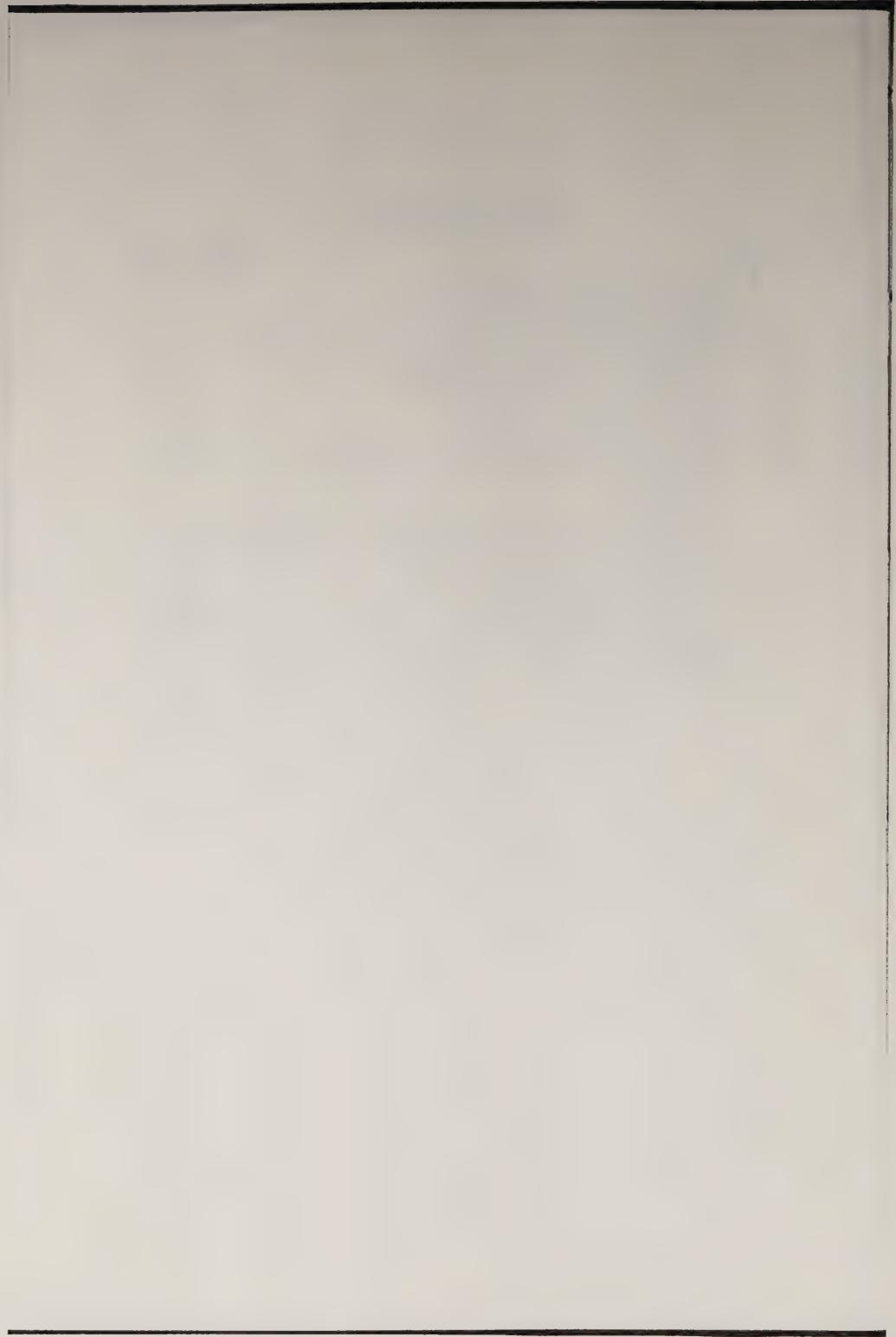
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CHAPTER I

DESERTS AND DREAMS OF ENCHANTMENT

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad . . . and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

—Isaiah 35:1

Somewhere the sun is shining . . . God lives, and all is well.

Somewhere . . . Beautiful isle of somewhere!

—Jessie B. Pounds

Introduction

LEADERS of most Christian churches would like to think, and they sometimes assert, that their particular denominations descended as clear historical entities from the original movement initiated by Jesus Christ. In this respect some Baptists have erred along with their brethren of other denominations. The best informed and least biased historians now know that such teachings of historical succession are spurious. Likewise, the doctrine of "apostolical succession" is obviously pure myth, serving only propaganda purposes, as no clergyman today can really and honestly trace his ordination in unbroken succession back to the hands of the apostles. Even if it were possible, it would be neither necessary nor relevant. The truth is that the structuring of church organization came with the dynamic flux of historical development, and this dialectical movement of history continues to the present time.

The validity of a church must rest finally upon its adherence to the principles of the New Testament. Baptists have fought to preserve the freedom and simplicity of the gospel, declared their freedom from ecclesiastical authority, and

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held to the Bible as their supreme rule of faith and practice. Various nonconformist and minority groups bearing diverse names have clung to these beliefs in one form or another from the beginning. Baptists are spiritually related to these groups. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, known principally as Anabaptists, they comprised the so-called "left wing of the Reformation."

Modern Baptists arose in England at the beginning of the seventeenth century. They soon spread to Colonial America. Throughout the world today there are about 23,000,000 Baptists. In North America alone Baptists number more than 20,000,000, all but slightly less than 200,000 of them being in the United States.

Oak Ridge Baptist Church cooperates with the Southern Baptist Convention and the Louisiana Baptist Convention. Southern Baptists number about 9,500,000. Louisiana Baptists work through more than fifty associations and more than 1,200 churches. Their membership totals about 400,000. Of those who are church members throughout Louisiana, an average of about one out of every four is a Baptist.

The community now known as Oak Ridge is situated between the fertile eastern rim of the Ouachita Valley and the western fringe of Northeast Louisiana's portion of the fabulous Mississippi Delta. During the periods of French and Spanish domination of Louisiana, this section was a part of that vast area known as the Province of Louisiana and was attached to the Ouachita District. Morehouse Parish, in which Oak Ridge is located, was carved from a part of Ouachita Parish in 1844.

Before the arrival of the first white settlers, the immediate vicinity of present-day Oak Ridge constituted the southern extremity of a series of latitudinal prairies. The entire region in early times was often loosely referred to as "Prairie Mer Rouge." Eventually, the settlers gave the name Prairie Jeffer-

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son to the southernmost of these prairies. In time the area adjacent to, and including, the original Prairie Jefferson was called Point Jefferson and finally Oak Ridge.

Baptists of Oak Ridge have every right to be proud of their religious heritage and their spiritual ancestry. Not only is this true because of the cultural and religious contributions made to the community by their forbears; but it is also true because the Baptists were in the vanguard of those intrepid pioneers who conquered this frontier and gave it a name. The story of those events can be understood better when traced against the background of the early history of the Ouachita District.

The Ouachita District

Under the French regime, a settlement was probably made near what is now Monroe, on the east bank of the Ouachita River, in the first quarter of the eighteenth century.¹ Its existence was brief. The remoteness of the Ouachita District from the seat of government at New Orleans and the constant threat of Indian attack proved strong deterrents to would-be colonists. The latter, moreover, consisted mainly of adventurers and fortune-seekers. These had few native endowments that would equip them for the trying tasks of clearing forests and coping with a climate and soil to which they were unaccustomed.

Itinerant French-Canadian hunters and Indian traders made transient visits to the region, venturing down the tributaries of the Ouachita from the Arkansas Post. They had neither desire nor reason to form permanent settlements, as they sought bear oil, pelts, and the like, which they could

¹ Jennie O'Kelly Mitchell and Robert Dabney Calhoun, "The Marquis de Maison Rouge, The Baron de Bastrop, and Colonel Abraham Morhouse—Three Ouachita Valley Soldiers of Fortune. The Maison Rouge and Bastrop Spanish Land 'Grants,'" *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XX (April, 1937), 293-94.

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boat to market at New Orleans. Vestigial reminders of these early visitors became household words in Oak Ridge—geographical names such as Bayou Bonne Idee, Boeuf River, Prairie Mer Rouge, Bayou Gallion, etc.

In 1762 Spain acquired the Province of Louisiana. The Ouachita District, at that time and for many years thereafter, comprised almost the whole of the present northern Louisiana and southern Arkansas. This immense district had a white population of only 110 in 1769.

The Natchez Country

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the Natchez Country in the settlement and development of Northeast Louisiana. Following the occupation of the fort at Natchez by the British in 1763, numerous Americans were attracted to the region. Control of the fort at Natchez was vital to the control of the Mississippi River and its environs. Thus, in the last half of the eighteenth century, Spain, England, and the United States fought bitterly for this territory. Spain supported the American Colonies in their fight for independence and wrested Natchez from the British in 1779. American settlers continued to flow into the country. After much dispute and long negotiations, the United States finally gained possession of Natchez and much of the surrounding territory in 1798. From 1798 to 1802, and again from 1817 to 1821, Natchez was the capital of Mississippi. It was incorporated as a city in 1803.

During and following the Revolutionary War, a host of pioneers from Pennsylvania and Virginia moved into the Carolinas and Georgia, across the mountains to Kentucky and Tennessee, and some finally found their way to the Natchez Country. The westward movement of population continued for many years.

After much controversy and delay, the Mississippi was

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opened to American shipping. New Orleans became an increasingly important center of trade for the Americans; numerous wealthy and influential American merchants were attracted to the city. Naturally, the merchants and visitors from the Natchez Country, most of whom were looking for fresh land and new opportunities, engaged in conversation about the possibilities offered by the rich Ouachita District.

The Ouachita District and American Encroachment

Americans from the Natchez Country formed an important nucleus of settlers in the newly developing Ouachita District. Developments growing out of the American Revolution gave impetus to a more rapid colonization of the area. Spain was unhappy with her new neighbors, for they were imbued with the spirit of independence, were often rowdy and indifferent to authority; not a few of them held strange notions of religious liberty and the separation of church and state—an unmistakable mark of the hated Baptists.

Toward the close of the eighteenth century, Spanish officials became alarmed over the growing power of the United States, the extension of its territory to the Mississippi River, and the encroachment of Americans upon the Spanish lands of Louisiana. Fear was felt for the security of this Spanish possession. Governor Carondelet therefore envisaged a buffer colony in the Ouachita District, one with a strong agricultural economy which would safeguard the country against American aggression and, by virtue of its wheat production, make the inhabitants independent of the United States. He hoped for a colonization by European immigrants, thereby anticipating a population with firmer allegiance to the Spanish Crown.

After the American Revolution, Spain wanted and expected the downfall of the American Union and sought the allegiance of the frontier settlements in the New West. Span-

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ish political policies reflected in the sporadic closing of the lower Mississippi to American shipping, however, only served ultimately to alienate these westerners.

Not unmindful of the Ouachita's strategic importance, Spanish authorities established the Ouachita Post in 1785, the entire district having been placed under the administration of a military commandant. The post was later called Fort Miro and eventually became Monroe. An overland trail and a good water route connected the posts of Ouachita and Natchez. It was believed that Fort Miro would implement Governor Carondelet's design for a buffer colony. New settlers came slowly in the early years, as evidenced by the census of 1788, which indicated a total population of only 232 for the entire district.²

The Land and the Inhabitants

Commandant Don Juan Filhiol described the Ouachita District with graphic accuracy. As it appeared to him in the late 1780's, the land was "light, deep and spongy," had a layer of black earth on top from a foot to eighteen inches thick, and water infiltrated the soil easily. He wrote:

You can enter the work in a plowed field the morning after a shower has fallen during the night. The earth keeps moist or feels so at four inches after a drought of 3 or 4 months in the summer.³

Among the products, the commandant named cotton, corn, rice, wheat, and tobacco. "All the products of the gardens," he said, "grow there very well."⁴

Wild animals, fish, and game abounded in the area. Tan-

² *Ibid.*, pp. 295-98.

³ Jean Filhiol, "Description of the Ouachita in 1786," trans. H. Wynn Rickey; published in J. Fair Hardin, "Don Juan Filhiol and the Founding of Fort Miro, the Modern Monroe, Louisiana," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XX (April, 1937), 480.

⁴ *Loc. cit.*

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yards were common, and traffic in deer hides was a profitable business as late as the 1820's. The last buffalo was reported seen near the post in 1803. Filhiol, however, listed among the animals "the tiger," wildcat, bear, and wild ox, and said that turkeys and geese were common and "ducks during six months of the year."⁵ He named among the fish "the crocodiles," although he said they were "rare toward the Post."⁶

The commandant wrote in anguished terms of the commerce of the district:

All the commerce of the country does not exceed annually six to seven thousand pots of bear oil, two thousand deer skins, 2000 pounds of suet, 500 beaver pelts and 100 otters.⁷

He attributed this to the indolence, shiftlessness, and lack of loyalty on the part of the inhabitants. Filhiol wrote:

... What a difference would not be seen if this same number of men were real cultivators. . . . Wandering and transient as are these unfortunates they would cherish their hearthsides and homes and would take an interest in the state of which they would consider themselves members. . . .⁸

Strangely, the commandant was almost the meticulous, objective scientist when describing the flora and fauna; but his bias became evident when he turned his attention to the inhabitants. They were hunters and traders and "dispersed through the vast forests without the least form of established government," and each "had a horror of subordination to authority."⁹ It was a rough frontier settlement, there can be no doubt; and Filhiol—accustomed to the military discipline of a Spanish command—had little historical perspec-

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 481.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 484.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 484-85.

⁹ Filhiol, original narratives in Ouachita Parish Archives, cited in Mitchell and Calhoun, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

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tive, much of which would have been required for a comprehension of the impact to be made by the frontier upon American culture. He could not have foreseen, at Ouachita, the significance of that incipient American frontier in terms of the future development of North Louisiana.

To Filhiol, then, the settlers at the Ouachita Post were "lazy to the uttermost," and if they hunted a little, it was "only to satisfy their first needs of nature."¹⁰ He wrote of their lack of industry:

. . . Twenty-five of them however finally got together and undertook to cultivate the land; but scarcely were there six among them who cleared enough of it to make their provisions . . . several others began and immediately abandoned.

They say . . . that they cannot work with their stomachs empty. . . . This reason would excuse them if their repugnance for work did not make one presume that it is not the only one.¹¹

The inhabitants were not only slothful, according to Filhiol, but they were also derelicts and criminals, as he reported:

. . . These men are composed of the scum of all sorts of nations, several fugitives . . . who, as well as the others have become fixed there through their attachment to their idleness and their independence, perhaps even to escape from the pursuit of justice before there was a Command.¹²

It was a bald and sometimes ribald frontier. The settlers, however, had a concept of the good life (at least some of them) which, however primitive it might have been, placed a higher value upon the freedom to hunt and trap at will, and in places of their own choosing, than upon the stiff amenities and correct social pleasantries of an Old World Court. It was, indeed, the New Frontier—new America spilling over upon the blackened embers and dead ashes of the

¹⁰ Filhiol, "Description . . .," *op. cit.*, p. 484.

¹¹ *Loc. cit.*

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 483-84.

DESERTS AND DREAMS OF ENCHANTMENT

fading old. Perhaps this was the real, and the unreasoned, complaint of sturdy old John Filhiol.

Fort Miro

During the early years, Indians roamed the region quite freely. A fort was therefore built as a protection for the few scattered inhabitants about the Ouachita Post. In 1790 a number of inhabitants of the post petitioned Filhiol for the building of a fort. A portion of the petition stated:

... The settlement has become for some time the great landing place of several Indian tribes, who, under pretext of hunting, by mutual understanding, remain here during two-thirds of the year; and considering that your petitioners are in such small numbers, scattered and absent from home during the hunting season, which is when the said Indians are most numerous, the families of the settlers and what they possess are exposed to insults and raids by the marauders. . . .¹³

When completed, the fort was named Fort Miro in honor of Governor Miro. It was located on the site of the present Monroe and was about twenty-five miles from the location where settlers within a few years were to begin what was to become Oak Ridge.

In the early 1790's Governor Carondelet gave increased attention to the Ouachita District. He soon found sympathizers who were willing to aid him in his schemes for the district, some of them French Royalists who had fled the French Revolution, having been banished and their property confiscated. Many of them were given generous grants along the Mississippi. Two of these titled gentlemen became interested in Carondelet's plans for the Ouachita—the Marquis de Maison Rouge and the Baron de Bastrop.

Carondelet wrote to Filhiol in 1795 that he "would not

¹³ Mitchell and Calhoun, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

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have there any kind of idle people or unfit for agriculture.”¹⁴ In one sense these two gentlemen lived in two different worlds—the world of reality on one hand and the world of dreams on the other. From his world of dreams, Carondelet wrote again to Filhiol: “. . . I hope that . . . you will transform those deserts into an enchanted land. . . .”¹⁵ It was such dreams, however, which inspired the early settlers to cross the Mississippi, leaving their homes and forsaking the Natchez Country, to claim and conquer a new land.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 302.
¹⁵ *Loc. cit.*

CHAPTER II

MODELS FOR POSTERITY

*Virtues neglected then, adored become,
And graces slighted, blossom on the tomb.*

—George Crabbe

For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

—Matthew 9:13b

*O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we,
Like them, the meek and lowly,
On high may dwell with Thee.*

—Samuel J. Stone

AS early as 1795 Governor Carondelet indicated that he had enlisted the support of the Baron de Bastrop for his grandiose plan to colonize the Ouachita District. Felipe Enrique Neri, known as the Baron de Bastrop, was a Hollander. A Royalist, he had been forced to leave his native land. Although his activities in the Ouachita District covered a span of only a few years, he became a controversial figure; and after moving to Texas, he had a prominent role in the early history of that state. When Morehouse Parish was formed in northeastern Louisiana, the seat of government for the parish, Bastrop, was named in honor of the Baron.

The Bastrop Spanish Land Grant

In June of 1796 the Baron de Bastrop addressed a petition to Governor Carondelet in which he expressed a desire to promote the population and agriculture of Ouachita. He requested that "a district of about twelve leagues square"

BAPTISTS OF OAK RIDGE

be designated, in order that he might settle upon the lands those families which he expected to introduce. The grants to the families introduced were not to "exceed the quantity of four hundred square arpents" each, one object being to prevent the introduction of Negroes and manufacturers of indigo, which "would be absolutely contrary and prejudicial to the cultivation of wheat," and would further cause the "petitioner to lose irremediably the profits of his establishment."¹

Carondelet immediately approved Bastrop's request and ordered Commandant Filhiol to designate the lands. The following year, however, the Baron complained that the area granted to him was partly occupied by old inhabitants and also subject to overflow. He requested that the location be changed so that his lands would lie along the Ouachita, Bayou De Siard, and Bayou Bartholomew. The Governor acceded to this request also and ordered the Royal Surveyor to provide a map and certificate delineating the Baron's grant. Subsequently, he executed a formal instrument which ratified the concession to Bastrop. This enormous grant of land measured roughly some thirty-six miles in length and equally in breadth; it extended eastward beyond Bayou Macon and northward into Arkansas. Included in the grant were almost all of Morehouse Parish and much of West Carroll Parish after they were created.

The Spanish government stipulated that Bastrop was to bring in 500 families as colonists to settle upon his grant, the Crown agreeing to underwrite the expenses of transportation from the designated place of departure, rations for a period of six months, and seed for planting the initial crops. The Baron visited the new western settlements of the United States and gathered a number of families at Louisville, Ken-

¹ Mitchell and Calhoun, "The Marquis de Maison Rouge . . .," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XX (April, 1937), 371.

MODELS FOR POSTERITY

tucky, early in 1797. Making New Madrid, in what is now southeastern Missouri, the point of departure, these colonists started down the Mississippi. En route to Fort Miro they stopped at Natchez, where not improbably a number of additional colonists joined them.² Numbering a total of about 100 persons of all ages, two groups of colonists reached Fort Miro in April and May of 1797. The first group was under the personal supervision of Baron de Bastrop. These two groups were doubtless the only colonists he introduced.

The Colonists and the American Frontier

When Bastrop visited the western settlements of the United States to recruit colonists for his Ouachita venture, he found a frontier in ferment. These back-country settlers had supported the American Revolution largely because they expected to achieve freedom from eastern tyranny. They resented their status as mere western divisions of eastern states. Kentuckians, who numbered perhaps 25,000 by the close of the Revolution, were particularly restive. The economic depression and disruptions of commerce following the war added to the uneasiness of these settlers. The West, however, felt a deep loyalty to the Union. Its inhabitants, drawn principally from the older states along the seaboard and a sprinkling from the Old World, were mostly of a common racial stock, spoke the same language, and cherished the same traditions. Old loyalties were soon obscured and state boundaries freely passed. The frontier, acting as a binding tie, tended to supply a common mold in the shaping of American traits.

Moving was not a new experience for these frontiersmen. They were eager for free land. Bastrop found his colonists among this group. In spite of the Spanish-American tensions

² *Ibid.*, pp. 379-80.

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they were ready to journey to the Louisiana Country. They could scarcely have been unaware of parallel developments in the Natchez Country; quite likely, they anticipated the early annexation of the Ouachita and adjacent areas to the United States.

One should not be surprised to learn of Baptist recruits (there were some) solicited by the Baron de Bastrop for his Ouachita enterprise, since numerous Baptists from Virginia and the Carolinas were among the early pioneers who crossed the mountains into Tennessee and Kentucky. By 1792 Kentucky had fifty-five Baptist churches.³ The economic status of these early Baptists made them vulnerable to the lure of cheap land, while the pure democracy of their church government made the democracy and free life of the frontier attractive to them. Their preachers also were usually farmers. One historian stated:

... Thus the Baptists were particularly well suited in their ideas of government, in their economic status, and in their form of church government to become the ideal western immigrants.⁴

Americanizing the Ouachita Frontier

Bastrop's colonists, predominantly American in sentiment and loyalties, simply continued the process of Americanization that had been in progress about Fort Miro for some years. This process was unabated by Spanish opposition. In the opening years at Ouachita Post the authorities probably acquiesced in a gradual American infiltration. Notwithstanding, the noblemen who were attempting to establish colonies encountered some difficulties. One of them complained bitterly that an American was taking land for him-

³ Glen Lee Greene, "North American Baptists (to 1845)," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, II, 985.

⁴ William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (revised ed.; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), p. 312.

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self that was intended for "the sixteen families and upwards of Americans he was to have brought into the country"; he also accused the American of settling on his claim, stating that "according to the custom of his country," he expected "to engross this tract." He could but wonder at the man's conduct, avowed the nobleman, since his remonstrances received only the answer from the man's son-in-law that "if any of my families should settle on his claim, that they would experience his courage." This gentleman, he said, had "done more in order to dare" him, having gone so far as to give permission to another American to make a clearing and start a cabin; and that one in turn had made a similar commitment to still another American. "When I made representations on this subject," the nobleman reported, "I received for answer but fiddle-faddles."⁵

In the meantime the government became alarmed over developments. Spanish-American relations had reached a critical stage. Carondelet stated in March of 1797 that he would "positively not have any Americans in that post."⁶ After the Baron de Bastrop brought in two groups of colonists in April and May of 1797, his contract with the Spanish government was suspended. In order that he might proceed with his project, however, he promised that since American settlers were unsatisfactory, he would bring in German farmers. This project never materialized. A short time later a Royal Decree was promulgated which prohibited the grant or sale of any Louisiana lands to a citizen of the United States. The decree came too late, as an irreversible process had already been initiated; the Americans had already come. Many years later an eyewitness told about them. They were farmers and cultivated corn, cotton, and wheat. He could

⁵ Mitchell and Calhoun, *op. cit.*, pp. 811-15.
⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

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not say where they came from, but they just "came up the river in boats and settled."⁷

A small influx of Americans had probably begun even before the establishment of the Ouachita Post. Bastrop had complained, after the first assignment of his land, that his property was "occupied by ancient inhabitants."⁸ Carondelet issued an order in 1796 forbidding a titled gentleman "to encroach upon the old inhabitants."⁹ He probably knew that settlers were arriving with some frequency, as he stipulated that Bastrop's land would be opened for occupancy by "the families which may first present themselves," in the event of Bastrop's failure to comply with his contractual obligations within three years.¹⁰

Many pioneers had filtered into the area without an invitation. They had little regard for protocol. Contrary to the hopes of Spanish authorities, it seems implausible that, if any, more than a handful of immigrants came from Europe. Many of these frontiersmen came from Natchez; some of them simply "squatted" on the land, having no legal title and apparently caring little for the consequences. Filhiol's attitude toward these settlers generally was one of contempt. In 1800 he reported unfavorably on the character of the immigrants that had been introduced.¹¹

Religious Conditions

For years following the establishment of the Ouachita Post the most primitive conditions prevailed. The remoteness of that frontier, the sparsity of population, and the diversity of cultural backgrounds and religious interests represented there militated against the early organization of religious

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 328-29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

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groups. Paucity of data precludes anything but a rough guess as to the religious preferences, if any, of most of the earliest inhabitants. The French and Spanish elements of the population had doubtless been considered Roman Catholics at one time. The Roman Church, following a pattern on the American frontier, lost heavily among the early immigrants.¹² For a great number of years there was no resident priest at Fort Miro or anywhere in the region, and the Catholic residents were only ministered to through the occasional visits of missionary priests who journeyed up the river to the fort. Commandant Filhiol attempted to conduct lay services according to the ritual of the Roman Church, assisted by the Marquis de Maison Rouge and a sprinkling of the others, although apparently without much impression being made.

As for the remainder of the inhabitants, Filhiol pictured them as renegades. He wrote:

Their customs correspond to their origin. Hardly do they know whether they are Christians. They excel in all the vices and their kind of like is a veritable scandal. The savages . . . hold them in contempt . . . their rifle and their powder horn comprise their entire property, and every country is good to them. The women are as vicious as the men, and are the worthy companions of their husbands. What models for their posterity!¹³

When allowance is made for a modicum of truth in Filhiol's appraisal (undoubtedly some of the settlers were dissolute and irresponsible), there remains his anti-American, his anti-Protestant bias. This can be seen when one recalls that Filhiol, when he spoke of Christians, had in mind those who worshipped as he believed they should; and he knew that

¹² Glen Lee Greene, "The Social Philosophy of American Roman Catholicism" (Doctor's thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1950), pp. 15-17.

¹³ Filhiol, "Description . . .," in Hardin, "Don Juan Filhiol . . .," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XX (April, 1937), 484.

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the Americans had been steeped in traditions of religious liberty and the separation of church and state—concepts foreign to the Spanish government.

One may validly assume that some Baptists were among the early residents, even though the identities and religious affiliations of those early settlers have been almost wholly lost in the labyrinthine stretches of time and changing historical conditions. The Baptists, always staunch defenders of freedom, had been in the front ranks of the advancing frontier, especially in the South. They were numerous in the areas from which the early settlers came to the Ouachita District. In some sections, such as Natchez, they represented in the earliest years the sole organized form of Protestant Christianity.

The morals of the inhabitants were not differentiated on the basis of denominational preference nor, for that matter, on the basis of social status. Some of the more "respectable" members of that society were no less profligate than the "squatters." The Marquis de Maison Rouge, who assisted Filhiol with religious services, remained unmarried, although he lived with a woman who was not his wife, fathered her considerable number of children, and had not the decency to acknowledge them legally or leave them his estate at his death. The Baron de Bastrop apparently abandoned his family in Europe when he embarked upon his speculative adventures in the New World.

These events evidently did not scandalize the Roman Catholic element of the population, but the marriage of Abraham Morhouse did. Morhouse, who became associated with Bastrop in the colonizing of his grant, abandoned a wife and children in the state of New York and in 1799 married a young woman at Fort Miro without troubling himself to dissolve the former tie or publicize his real marital status. The scandal among the Romanists was that he had

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submitted only to a civil ceremony.¹⁴ There was no resident priest, but they made no effort then or later to secure the services of one. Morhouse was almost certainly not a Roman Catholic, but his second wife probably had been one at some time.

Appalling as the religious conditions were, they grew to some extent out of the times and were the inevitable concomitants of a raw frontier. One may imagine that the settlers hardly concerned themselves with whether or not they were "models for their posterity." They were the hungry, the sick, the blind, the lost—the stuff of which a frontier is made and of which a church is made. They were part of the reason for the coming of the first Baptist witnesses, who brought the gospel of the transforming power of Christ.

¹⁴ Mitchell and Calhoun, *op. cit.*, pp. 387-88, 424-25.

CHAPTER III

JOHN COULTER: Baptist Apostle of Religious Liberty and Pioneer of Religion in North Louisiana

*Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely
according to conscience, above all liberties.*

—John Milton

*He gently leads me with His hand,
For this is heaven's borderland.*

—Edgar Page Stites

ON April 19, 1797, a small group of colonists landed at Fort Miro under the personal conduct of the Baron de Bastrop. Among them were John Coulter and his family. These devout Baptists, from information presently available, seem to have been the first persons definitely known to have been Baptists in what is now the state of Louisiana and might well have been the first known Protestants. They were almost certainly the first known in the state west of the Mississippi River.

Settlement Near the Gallion

Numerous references to John Coulter in the early records dealing with the Ouachita area show variations in the spelling of the name, although all of these references are to the same individual. Commandant Filhiol prepared a list of the colonists who arrived with Bastrop on which he named *Jean Kurter*, his wife, three sons, and a daughter.¹ Filhiol, of

¹ L. Perez (ed.), "French Emigrants to Louisiana, 1796-1800: Settlement of Bastrop and Morehouse in the District of Ouachita: Condensed Documentary History," *Publications of the Southern History Association*, XI (1907), 106-12; cited in Mitchell and Calhoun, "The Marquis de Maison Rouge . . .," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XX (April, 1937), 379-80.

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course, was French and wrote his legal documents in that language. He obviously gave a French twist to the spelling of Coulter's name.

In subsequent legal proceedings, various witnesses who were acquainted with Coulter gave depositions in which they identified him as one who came with Bastrop. The names by which they identified him included John Carter, John Curters, and John Courter.² Some of these early settlers were illiterate and pronounced the name in keeping with their peculiar customs. Variations in accent as individuals spoke may account for the variety in spelling. Court officials simply transcribed the spoken word as best they could.

Eventually the Bastrop grant became involved in protracted litigation. The United States government intervened to clarify and establish land titles. During these proceedings, testimony evolved which established the correctness of the name "John Coulter." When Coulter's son negotiated for the sale of some land, the prospective buyer wrote to his attorney instructing him to accept the "conveyance from Mr. Jacob Coulter."³

As soon as he arrived at Fort Miro, John Coulter began the search for a suitable location, in order that he might start preparations for a crop that year. Along with other heads of families introduced by the Baron, he had been promised 400 acres of land. Coulter selected a location a short distance northwest of the present site of Oak Ridge. It was in the region of Bayou Gallion, a stream along which the earliest settlers in that area located. He was soon joined by a number of other colonists who had come with Bastrop, forming on the Gallion what was undoubtedly one of the first permanent settlements in what is now Morehouse Parish,

² Mitchell and Calhoun, *op. cit.*, pp. 381-83.

³ *Senate Executive Documents* (32d Congress, 2d session [1852], No. 4), p. 812.

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while at about the same time a few colonists were locating a settlement on Bayou Bartholomew, farther north. Coulter began improvements on his land in 1797, the same year he arrived.

The country was new, facilities scarce, and surveyors hard to find. It was not until 1804, therefore, that John Coulter's land was surveyed and a certificate issued by James McLauchlin dated June 14, 1804. The following May the Baron de Bastrop executed a formal deed in favor of Coulter for the 400 acres of land. Executed in New Orleans before Henry Brown, a notary public, the deed recited that inasmuch as "certain persons who came with him were entitled to grants from him," he was transferring the described property to Coulter. This transaction was recorded in Ouachita County (called Ouachita Parish after statehood) on September 23, 1805.⁴

Patriot and Pioneer

John Coulter was born in Pennsylvania about 1742.⁵ How long he resided in Pennsylvania is uncertain, but in 1770 he lived at Baltimore, Maryland. In that year a Masonic lodge was chartered in Baltimore, the fourth in the state chartered by the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. Known as Lodge Number 16, Coulter was its first Senior Warden. His name appears on an early Roster or Roll Book of the lodge deposited in the archives of the Maryland Historical Society, although it is not mentioned in records relating to the affiliation of this lodge with the Grand Lodge of Maryland about 1795, when it became known as St. John's Lodge No. 20.⁶

⁴ Ouachita Parish Archives (Monroe, La.), Clerk of Court's Office, Conveyance Records, Book A, p. 20.

⁵ Alice Tracy Welch (compiler), *Family Records, Mississippi Revolutionary Soldiers* (Mississippi Society, Daughters of the American Revolution, State Board of Management, 1956), pp. 69-70.

⁶ Edward T. Schultz, *History of Freemasonry in Maryland* (Baltimore: J. H. Medairy & Co., 1884), I, 59-60, 232.

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In all likelihood, Coulter considered his residence in Maryland temporary, and it was probably occasioned by his line of work. Up to the time of the American Revolution, he apparently considered Pennsylvania his permanent residence, as he served for some seven years with the Pennsylvania Continental Line, Fourth Regiment. He served as a private in the companies of Captain Jenkins and Captain Henderson.⁷

There is some evidence that Coulter lived for a time in the Newberry District of South Carolina. Possessed of the roving disposition and restless spirit of the pioneer, he probably settled in South Carolina after the Revolutionary War. Like so many of his contemporaries, he was lured westward as the frontier beckoned. Whether he moved on to Kentucky before meeting the Baron de Bastrop is unknown, but in any event he assembled with the other colonists at Louisville. His party was personally escorted to Fort Miro by Bastrop, and he settled near the Gallion in 1797.

Before leaving Louisville, Coulter and each of the other heads of families received from the Baron a document signed by him and dated at Louisville in Febraury, 1797. The document read:

I will give to every family, industrious and well recommended, 400 acres of land—take where they please—six months' provisions, all kinds of seeds they want to plant out, and their children (that is to say, boys) will be enregistered; and when they come to age, 400 acres of land will be given to each of them, during this current spring.⁸

The Baron evidently moved very slowly in meeting this obligation. He became involved in other schemes and negotiations for the sale of his grant. Consequently, John Coulter joined a number of other colonists in instituting a suit

⁷ Welch, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

⁸ *Senate Executive Documents, op. cit.*, p. 770.

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against the Baron to insure the rights of their sons. The suit was filed on August 1, 1805, in the County Court of Ouachita County. Fearful that the land would be sold and the rights of their children jeopardized, the plaintiffs sought a judgment whereby Bastrop would be forced to honor his contract. Apparently, the suit was not pressed, and no immediate redress was obtained.⁹

Champion of Religious Liberty

An interesting facet of John Coulter's experience, among other things, was the fact that he lived in the area later to become Oak Ridge under the regimes of three different nations: Spain, France, and the United States. Leading the Protestant forces to the Gallion, he helped to open up the North Louisiana frontier to Americans. Arriving during the death throes of the Spanish regime, as a Baptist evangelist of truth, freedom, and the great light of the gospel, he opened a new front in the long and ceaseless Baptist fight for religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

Now, more than two centuries after his birth, who can say where John Coulter first heard the Baptist message? He was born in the strongest Baptist center of the nation at that time. The Philadelphia Association, the first organization of American Baptists, was composed of twenty-nine churches having a membership of some four thousand in 1762. These churches were located in several of the colonies, including Maryland. The Great Awakening stimulated this association so that it sent out itinerant evangelists. Between 1743 and 1762, its missionaries founded a number of churches along the Atlantic Coast as far south as Charleston, South Carolina. The Baptists of South Carolina experienced a phenomenal awakening beginning about 1790. Beginning in 1794, a tre-

⁹ Mitchell and Calhoun, *op. cit.*, p. 381.

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mendous influx of immigrants swept into Kentucky from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the Carolinas; in a short time, the ranks of the more than fifty Baptist churches were swelled unbelievably with the fruits of revivals. How could Coulter have avoided the Baptists?¹⁰

Prior to his arrival in Louisiana, Coulter had not only met the Baptists, he had imbibed their distinctive doctrines, especially their tenets of religious liberty, which had already distinguished them in the older settlements. Baptist churches in Pennsylvania and parts of the South were often wrecked during the Revolution. Such acts were due to the wantonness of the British soldiers. Beginning before the Revolution, Baptists in Virginia and North Carolina suffered popular violence and were restricted in their rights to preach and worship freely. Many moved on to the new frontier, taking with them their principles and doctrines. Baptists participated in the Revolution to no small degree because they believed it would hasten the achievement of their goals of religious liberty and the separation of church and state. One historian has stated:

The efforts put forth by Baptists in behalf of religious freedom, during and after the American Revolution, contributed greatly not only to the ultimate achievement of their goals, but also to their popularity. . . . Their participation in the War of Independence was therefore a contribution to the cause of religious liberty.¹¹

When John Coulter consented to accompany the Baron de Bastrop to Fort Miro and made his settlement on the Gallion, he was doubtless well aware of the religious conditions which obtained. But he was also well prepared to face them. It was not a mere accident that he chose a location

¹⁰ Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1952), pp. 232-48.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

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some twenty-five miles from the fort, an isolated spot with no visible signs of habitation.

In 1796 Bastrop wrote to Governor Carondelet about his proposed colony, suggesting that the government grant "to the inhabitants who are not Catholic the liberty of conscience enjoyed by those of Baton Rouge, Natchez, and other districts of the Province."¹² Actually, there had been no liberty of conscience anywhere under Spanish rule. However, the Governor replied to Bastrop in 1796, issuing the following decree with respect to the inhabitants: "They shall not be molested in matters of religion, but the Apostolic Roman Catholic worship shall alone be publicly permitted."¹³

Some writers in later years have tended to view Carondelet's decree as a terrific concession. John Coulter hardly considered it such. This is understandable when one remembers the persecutions of the hardy little band of Baptists near Natchez. Their pastor, only the year before Carondelet's decree, had been arrested, threatened with forced service in the silver mines of Mexico, and had to flee for his life for the performance of his duties as a minister.¹⁴ About 1798 a Baptist minister was jailed for preaching near Baton Rouge. Coulter had to labor without any promise of protection from the authorities of the Ouachita District.

It should be stated that the story of Coulter's residence in Louisiana has been hitherto unknown to writers of Louisiana Baptist history. The most recent writer said:

Although individual Baptists probably moved into Louisiana from the Natchez country of Mississippi as early as 1780, the first Baptists of whom there is a documented record, to enter

¹² Mitchell and Calhoun, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

¹⁴ J. L. Boyd, "Mississippi Baptist Convention," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, II, 882.

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the state were Bailey E. Chaney and his family, who came into East Feliciana Parish in 1798.¹⁵

Joseph Willis began his labors in the southwestern portion of the state in 1804, and James Brinson came to the Ouachita region of North Louisiana in 1820, but John Coulter antedated them all. At a time when frenzied efforts of the Spanish to discourage Protestant and American infiltration posed an almost insuperable obstacle, this courageous American and Baptist took his stand on the Gallion and on the Bible and challenged his opposition to oust him.

Baptist Leader—Maker of History

Although Coulter's sojourn in Louisiana might not have been as colorful as that of other early Baptist heroes (no available records tell of his having been jailed), yet he made history. He laid a foundation for the Baptists at Oak Ridge. They may properly trace the roots of their beginnings to John Coulter's venturesome settlement in 1797.

Coulter's successful stand on the Gallion, without any serious persecution so far as is known, may be attributed to a number of factors. His isolated location and the sparsity of population worked in his favor. The very remoteness of the Ouachita District proved to be an advantage, for the chief government officials resided in New Orleans—a great distance away and means of transportation to it and communication with it were difficult. By far the more forbidding element of the Catholic population resided in New Orleans and the other larger centers. There, too, were the larger garrisons of soldiers. Fort Miro had only a token force. The chief factor favoring Coulter was that the Ouachita District

¹⁵ C. Penrose St. Amant, "Louisiana Baptist Convention," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, II, 800.

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had no resident Catholic clergy. The minor Spanish officials offered only a meager coercive resistance. Commandant Filhiol was preoccupied with the interests of his plantations, and affairs generally were in a state of disorganization. During Coulter's residence, a transitional period, a steady influx of Americans swelled the non-Catholic population. The Spanish position grew more precarious, the French took over the government for a brief period, and finally the United States came into control.

After the Louisiana Purchase, the landowners within the Bastrop grant became uneasy; they feared for the validity of their land titles. Coulter's representations ultimately secured him a deed to his property, but there remained the uncertainty as to the position of the United States government with respect to the Bastrop grant. He felt apprehensive also about the security of his children. They had been promised land upon reaching maturity; but Coulter and others who joined him in bringing suit against the Baron to insure the rights of the children probably felt that their actions held little promise of bearing any immediate fruit. They became discouraged and apparently abandoned the suit. Coulter determined about this time to move on to other fields.

By the time he decided to move, Coulter had acquired a number of neighbors, most of them Mississippians. They had doubtless informed him about the lands there and had certainly conveyed information about the thriving Baptist churches. Visitors from Mississippi undoubtedly brought news from time to time about the flourishing Baptist work around Natchez and in southwestern Mississippi.

Coulter's interest was aroused and, accordingly, he moved with his family to Mississippi probably in 1806. His suit was filed against Bastrop in the summer of 1805. He was present at the meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Association in 1807,

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as a representative of the Bethel Baptist Church.¹⁶ He would have moved in the late fall or early in the year in order to have sufficient time to make a crop.

Whether Coulter first moved to Jefferson County is unknown. The Mississippi Baptist Association, the first in Mississippi, was organized at Salem Baptist Church in Jefferson County in September of 1806. Six churches were represented, including Bethel. No Minutes of this meeting were published; it is not known whether Coulter was present. He was living in Wilkinson County in September, 1807, when the annual session of Mississippi Association was held with Bethel Church, of which he was a member.¹⁷

Upon moving to Mississippi, Coulter immediately identified himself with the Baptists and the work of the association. He was called upon at once to assume a position of leadership, as he was elected the first treasurer of the first association in Mississippi. The association met for four days, the first two being occupied with public worship and concluding with the administration of the Lord's Supper. The Minutes of this first annual session in 1807 contain the following: "Brother John Coulter was nominated treasurer, and authorized to purchase a blank book for that purpose."¹⁸ Coulter was elected and served as treasurer of this association each succeeding year through 1812.¹⁹

The Bethel Church was located southwest of Woodville and was organized about 1800. When the association met there in 1807, it probably had less than 100 members, as Coulter was one of its two "delegates"; and this was the limit for a church of that size. In defining its powers the

¹⁶ Mississippi Baptist Association, *Minutes* 1807, in T. M. Bond (ed.), *A Republication of the Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association, etc.* (New Orleans: Hinton & Co., 1849), p. 12.

¹⁷ T. C. Schilling, *Abstract History of the Mississippi Baptist Association for One Hundred Years*, etc. (New Orleans: J. G. Hauser, 1908), p. 18.

¹⁸ Bond, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁹ Schilling, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

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association subscribed to the following, which doubtless the rugged old fighter for freedom, John Coulter, seconded with a hearty "amen": "This Association shall have no power to lord it over God's heritage, nor infringe upon any of the internal rights of the churches." ²⁰

During his active years, when he was in touch with the various churches of the association, Coulter came to know many of the Baptists of Jefferson and adjoining counties in Mississippi. By an odd coincidence, he was probably directed to Mississippi by Jefferson Countians, and in turn led many from that county to travel to the Ouachita frontier which he had lately abandoned. Quite likely, he was a moving force in laying upon the hearts of Baptists within Mississippi Association the tremendous missionary opportunities and needs in the Ouachita region of Louisiana. Having firsthand knowledge of this mission field, his eloquent pleas bore greater fruit in the responsiveness of his audience.

Prairie Gallion always had a warm place in John Coulter's heart. He had invested some nine years of his life in that field. One can imagine the eagerness with which he listened to some traveler lately returned, bearing news of former neighbors and friends; the questions he asked about the crops, as to how they were withstanding the drouth or the rains; his anguish and grief upon learning of the sickness and sorrows visited upon his prairie people. The recesses for refreshment, so vital a part of association time, fairly buzzed with conversation, for John Coulter was among his own.

Coulter moved about considerably even after taking up residence in Mississippi. He was reported to have lived in Amite County and later in Covington County. In his later years he was too aged and feeble to work actively in the churches and association, although his interest in Baptist

²⁰ Boyd, *op. cit.*, p. 882.

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affairs never flagged. Old with years (he was said to have lived to be about eighty-nine years of age) and wearied by war and work, the old soldier of the Revolution and the Cross died on March 26, 1831, in either Adams or Jefferson County.²¹

The Coulter Family

When Congress acted in 1851 to settle land claims within the Bastrop grant, testimony was taken by representatives of the United States Land Office at Monroe. Several witnesses offered testimony based upon their personal acquaintance with John Coulter and his family. This evidence indicates that Coulter and his wife had a daughter and two sons when they arrived with Bastrop in 1797. A third son was born about the time they arrived or shortly thereafter.²²

Mathew was the eldest of Coulter's sons. He was about five years of age when the family arrived. Hamilton, the second son, was about two years of age at that time. Jacob was the third son, born after their arrival. Mathew and Hamilton were never married. Mathew died when about thirty years of age, and Hamilton died when about twenty-two. This was after the family had moved to Mississippi.²³

In 1837 Jacob Coulter instituted a suit against the curator of the vacant estate of the Baron de Bastrop. As the sole surviving heir, Jacob Coulter sought and was awarded the 800 acres his two brothers were entitled to receive but had never been awarded. They were entitled to "headrights," as minor sons of Coulter, who had been promised this consideration from Bastrop. Jacob Coulter immediately sold both tracts to two different buyers. The tracts were located on Bayou Bartholomew, inasmuch as the original contract

²¹ Welch, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

²² *Senate Executive Documents*, *op. cit.*, pp. 768-69.

²³ *Loc. cit.*

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allowed a free choice in the location of the land. The records further indicate that Jacob Coulter rented a tract in Prairie Jefferson during the period 1839-1841.²⁴

The Coulter daughter married a man by the name of Williamson, who had come to Mississippi from Georgia in 1808. Jacob Coulter married Nancy Williamson; they were the parents of some six children.²⁵

²⁴ *Senate Executive Documents*, *op. cit.*, pp. 577, 768-76, 808-14.
²⁵ Welch, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROMISED LAND

... Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.

—Numbers 13:30

... O who will come and go with me? I am bound for the promised land.

—Samuel Stennett

JOHN COULTER represented one source of early Baptists in the Oak Ridge area—the colonization project of the Baron de Bastrop. The other principal source was found in the subsequent introduction of settlers by Abraham Morhouse. While the latter came principally from Mississippi, it would be more accurate to say that they came *through* rather than *from* Mississippi. Indeed, the families of early settlers may be traced in most instances to Virginia. The forbears of these settlers had moved out from that state as the frontier expanded. They went to the Carolinas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama. From these temporary stopping points, they moved on into Louisiana.

Before Coulter moved on to Mississippi he had become acquainted with Morhouse, whose settlers had already begun to stream into the area. His neighbors also included a number of families that had come with him under the Bastrop contract. It seems probable that a number of them were Baptists.

The Owen Family

Among the colonists introduced by the Baron de Bastrop, Christopher Owen and his family were in the second con-

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tingent, arriving in May of 1797. The boat had stopped at Natchez and could well have taken on passengers there. Owen had two sons and two daughters. One of the sons, Joseph, married Jane De Hart, who had also come with her family as part of the Bastrop colonists. This couple had two sons, James and William.¹ Following the death of her husband, Jane De Hart Owen married James C. Cooper, to whom she bore a son, James C. Cooper, Jr.² Some of her descendants are members of Oak Ridge Baptist Church today—for example, A. B. Conger, Jr., W. E. Conger, and Jack Bernard Files.

In connection with the Owen family, it is of interest to note that William Owen, a South Carolinian and a Baptist preacher, had come to the Natchez area early in the 1790's and was persecuted for preaching there.³ Willis McDonald, a devout Baptist and leader in the Mississippi Baptist Association, came to the Natchez area about 1797. His wife, Dortia, whom he married in South Carolina, was the daughter of James William Owen and Jane Wynn Owen. They had a son named Thomas Owen McDonald.⁴

The evidence would indicate a family relationship between Willis McDonald's wife and the William Owen who preached in the Natchez area. It seems plausible, further, that this Owen family was related in some way to Christopher Owen who settled in the Ouachita Country in what is now Morehouse Parish. The name "William" recurs frequently in this family as well as the name "James." The two sons

¹ *Senate Executive Documents* (32d Congress, 2d session [1852], No. 4), pp. 749-50.

² Ouachita Parish Archives, Conveyance Records, Book D, pp. 11-13. See also, *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Louisiana* (Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1892), I, 361.

³ T. M. Bond (ed.), *A Republication of the Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association, etc.* (New Orleans, 1849), p. 4.

⁴ Welch, *Family Records, Mississippi Revolutionary Soldiers* (Miss. Society, DAR, 1956), pp. 191-92.

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of Jane and Joseph Owen, James and William, both apparently had sons named William.⁵

Christopher Owen settled west of Bayou Bartholomew, but his son Joseph was given a deed to property along the Gallion, between the present Oak Ridge and Mer Rouge and near the settlement of John Coulter.⁶ William Owen resided in that locality for many years.⁷ A strong Baptist community was soon to spring up there, following the settlement of Coulter, Owen, and several other families.

Political and Social Developments

The Baron de Bastrop, encountering considerable difficulty with the Spanish Crown in his colonizing efforts, sold his grant in the spring of 1799 to Abraham Morhouse. This transaction occurred in Kentucky, where Morhouse, a native of New York, was then living. He came immediately to Fort Miro and established residence on Bayou De Siard. Frustrated by the Spanish Crown in his efforts to exploit his purchase, Morhouse resold the grant to Bastrop in the fall of 1800. He probably returned to Kentucky and remained there until after the cession of Louisiana to the United States.⁸

This was a difficult period for the settlers along the Gallion. They had built their rude cabins and cleared land. They had toiled with great sacrifice to make crops and improve their settlement; but their ownership of the land was constantly in doubt. The manipulations of Bastrop caused much anxiety, but the uncertainty of national control proved equally disturbing. Spain's indecision and inertia wrought only

⁵ Ouachita Parish, *op. cit.*, Book F, pp. 524, 526; Book J, p. 306.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Book A, p. 19; Book AB, p. 54.

⁷ *Senate Executive Documents*, *op. cit.*, pp. 724-51.

⁸ Mitchell and Calhoun, "The Marquis de Maison Rouge . . .," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XX (April, 1937), 387-90.

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confusion, while many rumors added to the excitement. The settlers scarcely knew who owned the province. Such circumstances halted the flow of immigrants into the region for a period.

On October 1, 1800, Spain retroceded the province of Louisiana to France. Difficulties over the right of deposit at New Orleans were not immediately relieved, which caused economic losses and much unrest in the West and in the South. The Gallion settlement, while too small to produce any considerable amount for export, yet felt the inconvenience of the restrictions and the losses entailed.

Napoleon wanted to keep the treaty of retrocession a secret until he could take possession of Louisiana with some assurance of keeping it, but President Jefferson soon learned of these developments. The people of the South and the West reacted to the news so adversely that President Jefferson was forced to act at once. Consequently, negotiations opened which resulted in the purchase by the United States from France of the whole of the province of Louisiana. Napoleon had delayed taking possession of Louisiana, so that his emissary formally accepted Louisiana from Spain only twenty days prior to the formal transfer to the United States on December 20, 1803.

Not only was the Louisiana Purchase a decisive event for the United States, it had far-reaching consequences for the Ouachita District. A more stable government was assured; new settlers would come with a feeling of greater security; the environment became more homogeneous and attractive for the Americans.

Morhouse: The Colonizer

With the Louisiana Purchase, the Ouachita frontier took on a new importance. A vast number of pioneers had settled

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temporarily in Mississippi, waiting for the opportunities afforded by the new government of Louisiana. The rich, alluvial lands lying between the Mississippi and Ouachita rivers offered a tempting prize, even at the terrible price in labor and sacrifice required of those who left the comparative comfort of the older settlements for the raw wilderness of the Ouachita region.

In view of the changed situation, Abraham Morhouse again acquired an interest in the Bastrop grant. On January 25, 1804, the Baron de Bastrop deeded to Morhouse an undivided two-thirds interest in the entire grant.⁹ A series of complicated legal proceedings followed which culminated in an act of compromise and agreement on May 18, 1805. According to this Bastrop, Morhouse, and Lynch agreement, Morhouse obtained an undivided four-tenths part of the whole grant. This involved a great part of the parish which later bore his name and all the area later called Oak Ridge.¹⁰ The agreement stipulated that all the settlers on the land should retain a clear title and provided that lands sold by Morhouse prior to the agreement were to be included in his portion of the grant. A schedule was attached showing the lands already sold by Morhouse.¹¹

Morhouse returned to Louisiana in 1804 and located at Prairie Mer Rouge, several miles north of the Gallion settlement already established. Both Bastrop and Morhouse were opportunists, adventurers, and land speculators. Morhouse, however, made a serious effort to colonize the vast region he had acquired. Although bitter controversies over ownership of the land caused much grief for many years

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 399.

¹⁰ Morhouse consistently signed his name with only one "e"; when the parish was given his name in 1844 the spelling was changed to Morehouse.

¹¹ Ouachita Parish, *op. cit.*, Book AB, pp. 76-79.

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after his death, he made a lasting contribution to the parish through his sales of land to substantial citizens, some of whom became permanent residents. Most of the first settlers introduced by him came from Mississippi; they were predominantly of the Baptist faith.

Baptists From Mississippi

Among those who first bought parcels of the Morhouse tract were several Baptist families from the Stampley Settlement, Mississippi Territory. Located on Cole's Creek, some twenty miles northeast of Natchez, this portion of Jefferson County attracted the first Baptist settlers in the state of Mississippi. A number of Baptist families, Virginia stock, came from the Great Pee Dee Valley of South Carolina in 1780 and formed the settlement. Led by Richard Curtis, whose son, Richard Curtis, Jr., was the first minister, these Baptists brought their church letters with them. They held services in the homes of the members from the beginning, and in 1791 they formally organized the Cole's Creek or Salem Baptist Church, the first Baptist church in Mississippi and the beginning of the first permanent Protestant organization in that state.

A number of other Baptist churches soon sprang up close to Salem. An association was formed within a few years. Jefferson County and adjoining Adams County formed a Baptist nucleus which attracted members of the denomination who were rapidly moving into the area. These new settlers, however, in many instances moved on out to new locations. A number of them found the Ouachita frontier attractive.

These Mississippians formed a settlement on the Morhouse lands between the Gallion and the Little Bonne Idee, just

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north of the present Oak Ridge. About the time he established himself at Prairie Mer Rouge in 1804, Morhouse secured the services of William Thomas, a resident of Jefferson County, Mississippi, who made a survey of a portion of the Morhouse lands. This survey began at the southwest corner of what is now the William Shepard Barham plantation.¹² Thomas received a deed to 1500 acres in 1804.¹³ William Thomas was a Baptist of considerable distinction. He was a charter member of the Salem Baptist Church, the first in Mississippi, and served as the first clerk of that church.¹⁴

A man of some education, Thomas served as Justice of the Peace and of the Court of Common Pleas of Pickering County, Mississippi, when it was created in 1799. The name of this county was changed to Jefferson, in honor of President Jefferson, in 1802.¹⁵ Thomas played an important role in the surveying of this first settlement on the Morhouse tract. He was influential in helping to attract some of his former Jefferson County neighbors and fellow Baptists to this new land.

Another large purchase of land in the new settlement was made by Prosper King, who acquired 1600 acres.¹⁶ Born in 1767, he was a member of Salem Baptist Church (Mississippi) and was buried in the cemetery of that church in 1827, having returned to his old home some time prior to his death.

Along with Thomas and King, one of the more prominent Baptists to come from Jefferson County to the new settle-

¹² *Senate Executive Documents, op. cit.*, pp. 166, 196-97.

¹³ Ouachita Parish, *op. cit.*, Book Z¹, p. 135.

¹⁴ Z. T. Leavell and T. J. Bailey, *A Complete History of Mississippi Baptists from the Earliest Times* (Jackson, Miss.: Mississippi Baptist Publishing Co., 1904), I, 79; II, 1521-22.

¹⁵ Dunbar Rowland, *History of Mississippi: The Heart of the South* (Chicago, 1925), I, 965-69.

¹⁶ Ouachita Parish, *op. cit.*, Book AB, pp. 76-79.

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ment was John Burch. He acquired 600 acres from Morhouse in 1804. His land adjoined that of Thomas.¹⁷ John Burch was a lay preacher. A member of old Salem Church, he later returned to Jefferson County and, having been licensed to preach, engaged actively in the work of the church, Mississippi Baptist Association, and the state Baptist convention.¹⁸

Many of these first residents of what is now the Oak Ridge community were kinsmen. Family ties and a desire to be together contributed no little to the decision to settle on the new frontier. Their common Baptist faith and missionary zeal also acted as strong motivating factors.

John Burch was a member of a pioneer family. His father, Samuel Burch, a Virginian, saw service in the Revolutionary War. John's widowed mother, Elizabeth, the daughter of Dibdal Holt, brought her family to Mississippi in 1778.¹⁹ She was married to James Truly in 1780. His family had come to Mississippi in 1773. A Virginian, he had returned to that state to enlist in the Revolutionary cause. A number of children were born to the Burch-Truly union.

James Bennett Truly acquired property near John Burch and William Thomas. He was a devout member of the Salem Church. Another member of Salem, Buckner Darden, also secured property adjoining these neighbors from Mississippi.²⁰ A strong Baptist community thus became closely knit by kindred ties; their closeness mitigated to some extent their

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Book Z¹, p. 135; also *Senate Executive Documents*, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

¹⁸ Salem Baptist Church (Cole's Creek, Jefferson Co., Miss.), Minute Book, Oct. 14, 1815-Aug. 29, 1834, pp. 2 ff, in possession of Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission, archives located at Mississippi College, Clinton. Also see Bond, *op. cit.*, *Minutes* 1811 ff; also see Boyd, "Miss. Bapt. Con." *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, II, 884.

¹⁹ Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

²⁰ *Senate Executive Documents*, *op. cit.*, pp. 340-41; also Salem Church, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11, *Minutes* 1821.

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loneliness and sacrifices in a frontier outpost. Still others came of whom the records give but little mention. Some of them bought no land but worked the land of their kinsmen and acquaintances; others made purchases of land but their deeds were never recorded. Quite tenuous were their claims; hence, indifferent were some to the legal technicalities. A few adventurers stayed only a short time before returning to Mississippi.

It seems probable that Philip B. Harrison, Philip B. Dougherty, and Jacob Free were among those who resided for a time in the settlement between the Gallion and the Bonne Idee. The Minutes of Salem Baptist Church indicate that these men, along with Prosper King, came forward and "expressed a wish to be and continue in the church," and "(they having been formerly members) . . . were approbated and considered belonging to the church."²¹ Harrison was the son, and Dougherty the grandson, of Richard Harrison and Martha Truly, the sister of the James Truly who had married the mother of John Burch.²²

Religious Conditions

The Baptist community which laid the foundations for the present Oak Ridge was not unique on the frontier, for an eminent authority has said that "in most instances Baptists were first on the ground in the western settlements," pointing out that "their preachers came with the settlers and the formation of a church was a comparatively simple matter."²³ No ecclesiastical organization or directing clergyman was necessary. Indeed, the old Salem Church had been or-

²¹ Salem Church, *op. cit.*, Minutes, Aug. 18, 1821.

²² Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

²³ Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York, 1939), p. 314.

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ganized without benefit of an ordained minister. Worship services were held first in the homes of the settlers. Many Baptist churches on the frontier were constituted with only six to ten members. Most of the communities had several men who possessed some speaking ability; these were called upon to use their gifts. If they proved effective, they were later ordained. Ordination at first was usually only a local matter, and not uncommonly the preacher was ordained for each new charge. One historian has pointed out that these Baptists "were strongly individualistic, poorly educated, hard-working farmers and artisans," and that "their preachers and churches were a reflection of themselves."²⁴

The new community astride the Gallion and the Bonne Idee was unusually rich in its supply of Baptist material for both a congregation and a ministry. The membership rolls of the first Baptist churches in Mississippi read like an Honor Roll of first settlers in what became Morehouse Parish. These settlers first busied themselves with the building of their rude cabins to the tunes of the grand old hymns of Zion. John Coulter, William Thomas, John Burch, and others were well prepared to lead the devotions that inspired these hardy pioneers in a bold venture of faith. It is cause for more than passing interest that those who laid the foundations of Oak Ridge Baptist Church were also those who helped to build the first Baptist churches and organize the first association and convention in Mississippi. It is not improbable that these struggling Baptists were visited upon occasion by Richard Curtis, Jr., the pastor of Salem Baptist Church in Jefferson County. Both Curtis and the Salem Church were intensely evangelistic and missionary minded. Curtis traveled

²⁴ Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia, 1952), p. 373.

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extensively and knew of the opportunities offered in the new field recently entered by his brethren from Mississippi.

In such an expanse of territory occupied by these first settlers, with primitive conditions prevailing and government oversight lax and new, there was little in the way of legal restraint or law enforcement. Baptist discipline therefore worked effectively toward the building of law and order—that is, an acceptable social climate and cultural milieu.²⁵

The Naming of Prairie Jefferson

In describing the Ouachita Country in 1786, Filhiol noted that the number of prairies east of the river did not seem natural. He presumed that they were "old clearings of former inhabitants who in the course of time had learned how to select their lands."²⁶ He was doubtless correct in theorizing that the Indians had cleared a chain of openings in the vast forest.

These small prairies dotted the countryside from Bayou Bartholomew on the north to Lake Lafourche on the south, in the region east of the Ouachita which was opened up for settlement by Abraham Morhouse. A casual reading of the earliest deeds to his settlers indicates that their lands were identified in relation to these prairies in many cases. The most prominent at first was Prairie Mer Rouge, where Morhouse located. Southward, along the Gallion, the open land was soon called Prairie Gallion. These descriptions were often vague, overlapping, and contradictory.

With the coming of the Baptists from Mississippi, the prairie south of the Gallion and Bonne Idee settlements was given a name. It was an American name, and not one of the

²⁵ William Warren Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), pp. 141-42.

²⁶ Filhiol, *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XX (April, 1937), p. 479.

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local names of French origin that had been given to streams or geographical areas. These Baptists looked southward toward the beautiful Indian Mounds, the fertile soil, and rich vegetation of a broad, expansive plain, and they thought of home; so they called it Prairie Jefferson. It was probably William Thomas, who began the Morhouse land surveys, who first thought of the name. So recently had they left Jefferson County, Mississippi, it was a natural selection. Besides, it was a way of honoring President Thomas Jefferson. He was esteemed highly by the Baptists, for he had contributed his services generously in the cause of religious liberty. Thus, the name Prairie Jefferson appeared in the schedule of lands already surveyed by Morhouse, a schedule which was attached to the Bastrop, Morhouse and Lynch Agreement. From then on Prairie Jefferson was used as a point from which to locate lands in the surrounding countryside. Eventually, the little village of Oak Ridge was to spring up adjacent to this prairie.

Not all of the settlers on the Morhouse lands came with religious motives. Most of them probably came with mixed motives, not the least of which included a business eye directed toward the lush delta lands—fertile, new and fresh, and practically free. It was a time of political intrigue, diplomatic maneuvering, and uncontrolled land speculation. Many a greedy frontiersman, eager for quick riches, believed in their entirety the stories told by the land speculators. They truly expected to enter the "promised land." Indeed, it was a land of promise; but its promises began to find fulfillment only after forty years of wandering, toil, disease, and death.

One eyewitness, seeing the pioneers coming in to settle the Morhouse lands, made the following report:

... These Americans came into this country, departing from

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the Natchez, some in frail pirogues and others advancing themselves by crossing the forests. I asked some of them 'What do you seek here?' and they replied 'It is the promised land close to Mexico, for which we all sigh. . . .'²⁷

²⁷ C. C. Robin, *Voyages dans L'Interieur de la Louisiane, etc.* (Paris, 1807), III, 98; cited in Mitchell and Calhoun, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

CHAPTER V

A DOOR OF HOPE IN THE VALLEY OF THE OUACHITA

And I will give . . . the valley of Achor for a door of hope.
—Hosea 2:15a

*The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
Make straight the way of the Lord.*

—John 1:23

*Thy cross is lifted o'er us;
We journey in its light;
The crown awaits the conquest;
Lead on, O God of might.*

—Ernest W. Shurtleff

NOT all of the land purchases from Morhouse represented irresponsible efforts to enter the "promised land" with ease. The Mississippi colony, led by William Thomas and others, comprised a sturdy, dependable class which made every effort to interest a better type of citizenry in the new country. These honorable Baptist pioneers succeeded in attracting a considerable number of their Mississippi neighbors.

Settlement of Prairie Jefferson

One of the first to settle at Prairie Jefferson was William Bolls. His deed to 500 acres from Abraham Morhouse was recorded on July 15, 1807.¹ The likelihood is that he made a crop that year, having come from Jefferson County, Mississippi, early in the year. Bolls secured title to "Lot No. 2"

¹ Ouachita Parish Archives, Conveyance Records, Book AB, pp. 42-43.

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of the initial Morhouse survey of ten lots in Prairie Jefferson, a tract of some five thousand acres. The lots measured roughly ten acres in width, running east and west, by fifty acres in depth, running north and south. The Bolls property was located along the west side of the present William S. Barham plantation and included the site of the present residence, its west boundary now being the Oak Ridge-Mer Rouge highway. Original rough drawings, preserved in early records, indicated the Little Bonne Idee running through the northern sector of the property.²

William Bolls was evidently a Baptist preacher-farmer. His family was prominently identified with the leading early Baptist churches in Mississippi. Adding his voice to that of John Burch, he joined the forces already established along the Gallion in a noble effort to evangelize a strange land. William Thomas and others cooperated in pooling the resources of the two communities in order to bring spiritual hope to a segment of the Ouachita Valley.

About this time other families began to settle at Prairie Jefferson rather rapidly, although prior to 1850 the population never amounted to more than a mere handful. Among the new settlers were several families from Mississippi by the name of Griffing. The name was common in the minutes and on membership rolls of early Baptist churches in Mississippi.³ A relative, John Griffing Jones, whose mother's maiden name was Griffing and whose family on both sides were chiefly Baptists, told the story at some length.⁴ The

² *Senate Executive Documents* (No. 4, 1852), pp. 229, 234.

³ Salem Baptist Church (Miss.), Minute Book, 1815-'34, and Fellowship Baptist Church (Jefferson County, Miss.), Minute Book, 1832-'85; located in archives of Miss. Bapt. Hist. Commission, Clinton.

⁴ John G. Jones, *A Concise History of the Introduction of Protestantism into Mississippi and the Southwest* (St. Louis: P. M. Pinckard, 1866), pp. 66-100.

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Griffing family, through intermarriage, had become connected with the prominent Swayze, Jones, and Curtis families in Jefferson County, Mississippi. Hannah Swayze, daughter of an early Congregationalist minister in Mississippi, married a man named Coleman. After the death of her first husband, she married Richard Curtis, Sr., a widower and leader of the first Baptist community in Mississippi. His son, Richard, Jr., was the first Baptist minister in that state. Among the descendants of Hannah Curtis were a number of Baptist ministers.⁵

William Griffing often represented his church at the meetings of the Mississippi Baptist Association. An active Baptist, he married the daughter of John Jones, Sr., whose mother was the first wife of Richard Curtis, Sr. William Griffing signed as a witness when his brother-in-law, John Jones, Jr., bought a tract of land in Prairie Jefferson.⁶

Jones made his purchase in 1819 from Gabriel Scott, who might have been his sister's husband. The tract of 450 acres adjoined the northwestern end of the Mound Tract and the southwestern corner of the William Bolls tract.⁷ Eventually the property came into the possession of James C. Cooper. It became a part of the Cooper-Rolfe plantation; some of Cooper's descendants reside now on the tract once owned by John Jones, Jr. The Jones-Curtis family has gained recognition and become widely known in the history of both Mississippi and Louisiana Baptists.

The Political Situation

The early settlement of Prairie Jefferson was undoubtedly retarded by the political turbulence and unstable economic

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-7.

⁶ *Senate Executive Documents, op. cit.*, pp. 207-8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 229; also see Welch, *Family Records* (DAR, 1956), pp. 161-62; also Morehouse Parish Archives, Conveyance Records, Book B, p. 97.

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conditions which prevailed and cast a shadow over the region during much of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. This partly accounts for the further fact that not a few of the first settlers did not remain as permanent residents. Much of the land changed hands rapidly in the early years. This was due in part, however, to the rough life required of the first inhabitants, as well as the shiftless quality of some who sought only the course of least resistance.

Paradoxically, some of the factors which operated to retard the growth of the region probably were the chief elements in bringing a few settlers. This was true especially of those who loved adventure and political intrigue. Evidence indicates that Morhouse was at least partly aware of Aaron Burr's complicated schemes. Testimony brought out in the legal proceedings instituted against Burr in 1807, when he was indicted on treason and misdemeanor charges, indicated that he contemplated a colonization project on a part of the Bastrop grant which he had contracted to purchase.⁸ It will doubtless never be known how many settlers Morhouse lured to Prairie Jefferson and his adjacent properties by glittering tales of anticipated adventure, conquest, power, and wealth.

Prior to 1812, when Louisiana was admitted to the Union, the settlement of Prairie Jefferson probably suffered because of the political disquiet which tended to develop a sense of insecurity. But far more serious in its effect upon settlers and prospective settlers was the economic situation, an outgrowth of factors developing from the precipitation and prosecution of the War of 1812. As early as 1807, British interference with American shipping had been met with an embargo on commerce with the outside world. Farmers depended heavily

⁸ Mitchell and Calhoun, "The Marquis de Maison Rouge . . .," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XX (April, 1937), 408-13.

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on foreign trade, and Prairie Jefferson's economic life was linked to the commercial center of New Orleans. It was not until after the Battle of New Orleans early in 1815 that the economic picture began to brighten. Farmers were not only inconvenienced in their purchases of needed supplies, but their disposal of surplus commodities—and thus their source of credit balances—was seriously jeopardized or cut off. Planters at Prairie Jefferson depended upon New Orleans merchants for credit, and when they found this service no longer available many of them were ruined.

Political and economic conditions played a part in the extraordinarily rapid turnover of the population in the first decades of the Prairie Jefferson settlement. Other elements involved in the situation included the interest of land speculators in the area and the considerable number of non-resident owners whose sole interest consisted of the profits they hoped to make through their land sales. A few of the residents also moved on to other areas of the parish, doubtless seeking a closer proximity to their acquaintances and relatives, and some probably believed the Ouachita and Bartholomew communities offered better advantages for farming.

The Baptist community along the Gallion had suffered severe losses by the time Prairie Jefferson was being settled. Gradually Prairie Jefferson became the Baptist center of activities, as new settlers moved in and occupied the lands south of the Little Bonne Idee. Almost all of the Mississippi Baptists who had settled between Prairie Jefferson and Prairie Mer Rouge eventually returned to their former homes. Thus, in 1811 John Burch was back at the Stampley Settlement, for in that year he represented the Salem Baptist Church at the meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Association.

In spite of the unsettled conditions and movement of

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population, Baptists were not left without witnesses. William Thomas, advanced in years and having made a lasting imprint upon Baptist life in at least two states, remained through the distressing years of the War of 1812. He probably died in 1815 or early in 1816, as in the latter year (word having reached his friends in Mississippi) reference was made in the Minutes of Salem Church to "our old church book kept by William Thomas, deceased."⁹ The Thomas property was sold for taxes in 1819, although it was redeemed by the family the following year.¹⁰

Economic reverses arising from the trying war years probably forced William Bolls to leave Prairie Jefferson. His land was acquired at a tax sale in 1825 by Stephen Girard and others,¹¹ who bought a vast acreage in the region of Prairie Jefferson. William Bolls evidently was the son of Wilson Bolls, who was a representative from Salem Church at the first meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Association in 1807 and whose death was noted with lament by the association in 1813. The Minutes of Salem Church indicate that William Bolls preached there upon an occasion in 1817.¹² In later years his brother, James, died leaving a family, which William helped to rear. One of the boys, William Wilson Bolls, became a well-known Baptist minister, serving both Fellowship and Rodney churches as pastor.¹³

Social Conditions

The slow development of the Prairie Jefferson community during the first three decades of the nineteenth century re-

⁹ Salem Church, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Ouachita Parish, *op. cit.*, Book E, p. 428.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Book F, p. 437.

¹² Salem Church, *op. cit.*, Minutes, 1817.

¹³ L. S. Foster, *Mississippi Baptist Preachers* (St. Louis, Mo.: National Baptist Publishing Co., 1895), pp. 67-71.

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sulted not only from the turbulence of the political and economic scene but from the crude social conditions generally prevailing on such a raw frontier. Extant documents of the period abound with evidence of widespread illiteracy, a condition which today one finds difficult to conceive. It was a rare exception when any woman could sign her name. A shocking number of capable farmers and heads of families signed legal documents with a mark. The signature appeared

his

this way: John X Doe. Schools did not exist, and ignorance
mark
begot ignorance.

Testimony recorded at mid-century by those who knew conditions as they existed in the early years indicated the extent of the indifference and apathy in that day. The widow of a prominent planter "burnt a great many old papers . . . which she deemed of no value." Again, one report stated:

It is part of the history of this part of our country, that as far back as 1811 to 1815 the records were kept very negligently. Many deeds and valuable papers were found for many years unrecorded.¹⁴

At first the settlers at Prairie Jefferson owned few slaves because of their economic status. These men, along with the women, worked long hours to fell timber, build fences, erect their log cabins, and cultivate their lands. The land was virtually bought with the blood of these pioneers. Fighting against poverty with but meager resources, most of them suffered from an inadequate diet. For many, a change of climate proved disadvantageous. Poor drainage, flood conditions, plagues of insects, and lack of medical attention took a heavy toll in protracted illness and death. The records

¹⁴ *Senate Executive Documents, op. cit.*, pp. 152-53.

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can scarcely be read without notice of the early age at which so many of the men died. Infant mortality and the deaths of women in childbirth were appalling. Never a populous community, the scattered families of Prairie Jefferson found a common bond in the mirthless songs of a rhythmless age.

For many years the Prairie settlers faced a problem in securing supplies. Probate sales offered an opportunity for those who had prospered to secure stock, equipment, household goods, and the like. Records of these sales indicate something of the prices which prevailed at the time and of the commodities most sought after. In 1815, for example, a tract of land sold for fifty cents per acre at a probate sale. A slave brought \$115, about thirty head of cattle \$100, and two yearling colts \$35.00.¹⁵

In 1821 prices were better, for in that year a large probate sale produced the following results: slaves brought from \$400 for a man and wife to \$1,250 for Negro Phil. A Negro girl brought \$710; Letty and her two children, \$800. Cotton already ginned and baled sold for eighteen cents per pound; corn, for about fifty cents a bushel. A bay horse went for \$100 and the "stock of cattle, as many as there may be, at eight dollars each for all delivered." A part of the Mound Tract was purchased for about \$3.00 per acre; other land, for \$1.25 per acre. Sheets brought \$5.00 a pair, six mosquito bars \$36.00, and two spinning-wheels \$7.00. A pair of andirons, a shovel, and tongs sold for \$31.00; a potrack and pair of hooks, for \$2.12; a silver soup ladle and six large and five small silver spoons, for \$25.00. A plantation wagon and some harness were priced at \$179. One cotton gin and a horse "with all the appurtenances belonging thereto" went for

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

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\$300. Another buyer paid \$23.00 for twelve mahogany chairs.¹⁶

The records of a probate sale in 1835 indicate that land at Prairie Mer Rouge sold for \$3.00 per acre, corn for \$1.00 per barrel, twelve head of horses for \$800, and thirty head of cattle for \$120. Two ox carts brought \$60.00 and a plantation bell, \$30.00. A Negro man, age thirty-five, his wife, age thirty-two, and their eight children, ranging in age from fourteen years to three months, sold for \$2,800. Samuel, twenty-one years old, and his wife, twenty, were sold for \$1,410.¹⁷

Social and economic factors not only retarded the growth of Prairie Jefferson; they helped to fasten a measure of immorality upon the community. The difficulties involved in obtaining marriage licenses and suitable persons to officiate sometimes caused men women to yield to the temptation to begin housekeeping together without the benefit of formalities or religious sanction. Indifference, together with infrequent opportunities to hear the Christian message, undoubtedly added to the unwholesome situation. All too often, the overwhelming urge to acquire wealth quickly took precedence over all else. One observer probably stated the case too harshly when he said that he was "constrained to acknowledge that Gospel seed was never sown upon a more ungracious and unproductive soil."¹⁸

The Baptist Witness

The more populous settlements and areas that offered promise of more rapid development attracted itinerant preachers with greater frequency. Baptists, however, were not dependent entirely upon the ministry of irregular itiner-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 726-43.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-55.

¹⁸ Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-57.

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ant evangelists. They were inclined to bring their preachers along to live among them when they moved out to the frontier. The laymen not infrequently supplied the pulpit in the absence of a minister. It is true, however, that the conditions which retarded the growth of the community generally also retarded the growth of religion.

Baptists, being first on the field, put down solid roots in spite of the difficulties. Men such as William Thomas and John Burch built relentlessly upon the foundation laid by John Coulter. With the movement of the settlement toward Prairie Jefferson, Baptists were ready with a man of the soil and the Word to live and preach among them. William Bolls, who lived near the shadows of the Indian Mounds, was probably the first to preach to the Prairie settlers under the shadow of the Cross of Christ.

The Baptists were fortunate in having a man such as John Jones, Jr., to move into the Prairie Jefferson community, where he remained until 1837. Jones had grown up in a family of Baptist preachers and was accustomed to having them in the home. His residence doubtless served for many years as a preaching place for the Prairie settlers, especially after William Bolls returned to Mississippi.

Preaching services probably were conducted at irregular intervals during the early years, and attendance was always disappointing, because of the necessity of continuous labor on the part of the men, the distances separating the settlers, poor roads and means of travel, the prevalence of disease, and inclement weather conditions, particularly in the winter. The preacher's services were required in other communities, a circumstance which sometimes occasioned prolonged absences from home; and his farming was a means of support, a fact which forced him to devote considerable time to it.

There can be little doubt that Mississippi Baptists, who

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maintained a steady and prayerful interest in the work at Prairie Jefferson, sent itinerant missionary preachers from time to time. It could hardly have been otherwise, since there was such a strong bond between them. At the meeting of Mississippi Association in 1813, attended by John Burch representing the Salem Church, the desire was expressed "to promote itinerant preaching." The Mississippi Society for Baptist Missions was organized. In 1817 this organization issued a circular address which, among other things, called attention to "the very destitute parts . . . of Louisiana." John Burch served as treasurer of the Society. At this early date at least one missionary was appointed "for a circuit on the West" of the Mississippi River, the territory in the northern part of the state.¹⁹ The interest of the Salem Church was further demonstrated in 1820, when it voted to take a quarterly offering for the expenses of traveling preachers.²⁰

One who knew the conditions well said that Baptist growth was due in large measure to the fact that "most of the ministers kept up a sort of irregular itinerancy," and that this "proved a great blessing to destitute settlements." The same author correctly lamented the paucity of information about the "self-denying and laborious men who were conspicuous in the early struggles of the Baptist Church in the Southwest."²¹

Baptist worship during the early years at Prairie Jefferson was characterized by utmost simplicity, meager resources, crude facilities, and deep devotion. The few scattered Baptists gathered in a home when the preacher "gave out an appointment." Bibles and hymnals were scarce and precious.

¹⁹ John T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists of Louisiana* (Shreveport, La.: The Executive Board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, 1923), pp. 55-60.

²⁰ Salem Church, *op. cit.*, Minutes, 1820.

²¹ Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-61.

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The lines of a hymn, well known to all, were called out by a leader, the people joining in the singing alternately. Prayers reflected the sincere fervor and earnest piety of the simple believers. The preacher read a favorite passage from his well-worn Bible; then he delivered a lengthy sermon, which usually consisted chiefly of exhortation. Revivals were held during the summer months after the crops were "laid by." The roads were more passable in that season than in the winter.

At least by the early 1830's the camp meeting type of evangelism had been introduced in the general vicinity, although Prairie Jefferson was never a large enough community to attract such meetings on a large scale. The camp meetings in many areas had produced "peculiar bodily exercises, such as falling, jerking, rolling, running, dancing and barking," and some of the participants "were taken, cursing and swearing as they jerked."²² Such meetings generated (quite figuratively) more lightning than light; yet they afforded opportunities for pleasant pastimes and conviviality, and in 1831 a parcel of land on the Gallion was purchased at a camp meeting.²³ These meetings ordinarily were of a non-denominational nature and their lasting good results open to question. Nevertheless, Baptists frowned chiefly on the emotional excesses involved and usually had little to do with the camp meetings.

Baptist Neighbors

By the 1820's Baptist work had begun to flourish in Ouachita Parish west of the river, a number of ministers having settled there, including James Brinson, John Impson, and Haywood Alford. These men on occasion doubtless visited the settlements in Ouachita east of the river. The

²² Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America*, pp. 332-33.

²³ Senate Executive Documents, *op. cit.*, pp. 595.

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Louisiana Association, the first in the state, had been organized in 1818 in the central portion of the state. Distances involved and poor means of travel prohibited anything like a representative attendance on the part of the churches in the northern section of the state. Consequently, in 1832, Concord Association was organized by four of the churches in the northern area. One of these four churches was Bayou Bartholomew Baptist Church. The history of this church is so obscure, has been so poorly related, and has such a bearing on the early religious history of Morehouse Parish that the known data should be detailed and preserved.

Paxton,²⁴ writing in the 1880's after Bayou Bartholomew Baptist Church became extinct, erroneously stated that the church was located in Ouachita Parish near Trenton. The church was located actually on the east bank of Bayou Bartholomew near old Point Pleasant, on the outskirts of the present Bastrop, in Morehouse Parish. At the time it was organized the church was in Ouachita Parish; but in 1844, when Morehouse Parish was created, that part of the parish where the church was located became a part of Morehouse.

The property on which the church and cemetery were located was donated to Bayou Bartholomew Baptist Church in 1836 by William A. Doles, who later served as sheriff of Morehouse Parish.²⁵ Lemuel Newman, a member of the church, acted for the church in the transaction. The Newman family owned a considerable amount of property in the vicinity, the church and cemetery having been established on land owned at her death by Mary Ann Newman, from whose estate Doles acquired the property.²⁶ In 1844 Doles sold the remainder of the tract to Asher Temple,²⁷ who

²⁴ W. E. Paxton, *A History of the Baptists of Louisiana* (St. Louis: C. R. Barnes Publishing Co., 1888), p. 252.

²⁵ Ouachita Parish, *op. cit.*, Book H, p. 440.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

²⁷ Morehouse Parish, *op. cit.*, Book A, p. 36.

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eventually transferred it to Daniel B. Douglass.²⁸ The site of the old church and cemetery—its remains are now known as the Douglass Cemetery—is on property now owned by George T. Madison.

The Newmans, a large Baptist family from Catahoula Parish, had begun to settle on Bartholomew at least as early as the late 1820's, and some of them, including Jonathan Newman, at one time owned property between Prairie Mer Rouge and Prairie Jefferson. Jonathan Newman was a Baptist minister; he served for many years as pastor of the Bartholomew Baptist Church. Eventually he moved west of the Ouachita River, where he died. Later, his widow married a man named Hasley. She built the Baptist churches both at Trenton and Monroe with her own funds.²⁹

The Bartholomew Baptist Church probably became extinct about the time of the Civil War. Some of its members in all likelihood became charter members of the church at Bastrop when it was organized about 1850. Bartholomew might have been founded—although this cannot be stated with certainty at the present time—by Jacob Hickman, a minister who settled on Bayou Bartholomew near Point Pleasant about 1811.³⁰ There is a strong probability that he was a son of William Hickman, a pioneer Baptist minister in Kentucky.³¹ John Hickman, who lived a mile north of Prairie Mer Rouge as early as 1813, could well have been Jacob Hickman's brother.³²

Of historic interest is an obscure reference to a "Shaker tract," on which was "Ballinger's Camp," the tract compris-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Book G, p. 149.

²⁹ Paxton, *op. cit.*, pp. 244-67, 525.

³⁰ *Senate Executive Documents*, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-5.

³¹ W. P. Harvey, "Sketch of the Life and Times of William Hickman, Sr.," *Publications of the Kentucky Baptist Historical Society*, No. 1, ed. W. J. McGlothlin (Louisville, Ky.: Baptist World Publishing Co., 1910), 100 pp.

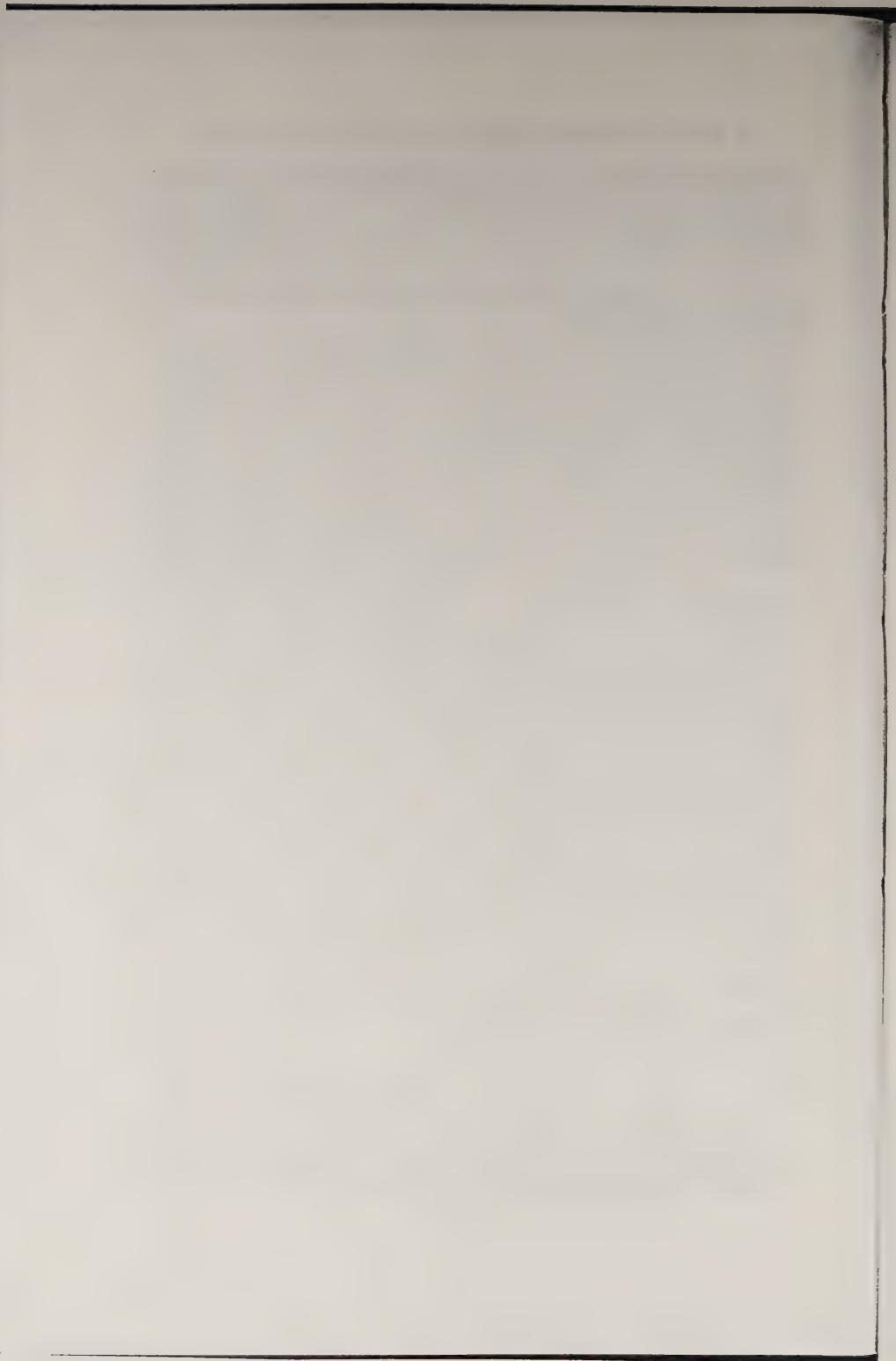
³² Ouachita Parish, *op. cit.*, Book C, p. 28; Book H, p. 87.

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ing some 4,000 acres and ultimately a part of it becoming the property of Hickman.³³ Although not connected with the Baptists, the Shakers were a peculiar sect which flourished about that time in Kentucky, among other places. These unsettled but interesting problems will challenge contemporary and future historians.

Prairie Jefferson, by 1830, had attracted a not inconsiderable number of Baptists. These zealous pioneers had established the faith firmly among the Prairie settlers. In addition, they had formed strong ties of Christian and denominational fellowship with their brethren in other areas—along the Gallion, at Prairie Mer Rouge, on Bayou Bartholomew, west of the Ouachita, and in Mississippi. Truly a door of hope had been opened in the vast wilderness, the broad expanses of the Ouachita Valley.

³³ *Senate Executive Documents, op. cit.*, pp. 104-37.



CHAPTER VI

HIGHER GROUND

*... That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.*

—Tennyson

The Lord gets his best soldiers out of the highlands of affliction.

—Charles Haddon Spurgeon

... Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

—Johnson Oatman, Jr.

THE reverses suffered by the first pioneers at Prairie Jefferson, almost all of whom had died or moved away by 1830, served as enduring reminders to the second and third generations that the door of hope which opens to higher ground is always entered through sacrificial self-denial. Prior to the 1840's the growth of Prairie Jefferson remained negligible; the land continued to change hands rapidly. This was true in spite of the fact that the state as a whole was experiencing its most rapid growth, and the population was concentrated preponderantly in the rural areas.

Several factors related to economics helped to create the situation at Prairie Jefferson. The United States suffered a severe panic in 1819, resulting in a drop in the price of cotton from thirty-two cents in 1818, to eighteen cents a pound in 1820. Again in 1837, business came almost to a standstill, and economic conditions remained unstable for many years; some states, including Louisiana, repudiated their debts. In the second place, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that anyone at Prairie Jefferson could be certain that he really owned the land to which he had title. Not until 1851 did

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Congress pass an act which served as a basis for the settlement of land claims within the limits of the Bastrop grant. Finally, the remoteness of the Prairie Jefferson community from the established steamboat landings made the marketing of cotton difficult.

Point Jefferson

Conditions regarding the progress of the Prairie Jefferson community began to dissipate in the 1840's. A part of the new and rapidly growing Southwest, the lands were ideally suited to the production of cotton. Planters in the Southeast, where the lands showed signs of wearing out, often sold their plantations and bought the more productive acres offered at Prairie Jefferson. Sometimes the eastern planters merely enlarged their own holdings as their yield per acre declined, thus buying out the smaller farms of their neighbors, who in turn sought the fertile soil of Prairie Jefferson.

Improvements in the techniques and mechanics of textile manufacturing immensely accelerated the world demand for cotton. In 1840 the South produced 1,500,000 bales of cotton, but in 1860 it produced 5,300,000 bales—seven-eights of the world's supply. A steady fall in the price of cotton at first accompanied the expansion of the industry, although this trend was arrested in the 1840's and reversed in the 1850's. From the low of six cents a pound in 1845, the price of cotton rose on an average to about ten or eleven cents throughout the fifties and reached almost fourteen cents in 1857. At the outset of the Civil War more than half the value of American exports was in cotton.

The expanded production of cotton at Prairie Jefferson gave rise to the more widespread ownership of slaves. Prices paid for slaves increased correspondingly. Consequently, few small landowners could compete with this system, and the trend was established—which has continued—for the

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community to consist predominantly of large landowners and to have a heavy Negro population. Results of this trend were not all negative, as a more dependable and permanent land-owning class developed, a circumstance which gave greater security and permanence to the religious forces at work within the community.

In 1819 the first steamboat churned up the Ouachita River to Monroe. With the expansion of cotton production, a lively commerce developed, and river transportation afforded the only means of getting the cotton to the New Orleans market. Improvements in cotton gins and their placement in easy reach of the planters brought a demand for more convenient marketing. When water levels permitted, therefore, boats traveled up Bayou Bartholomew to Point Pleasant; for a number of years Prairie Jefferson planters shipped their cotton from this place.

During the 1840's the growth of cotton planting proved sufficiently advantageous commercially to initiate steamboat traffic on Boeuf River in its navigable stages. A landing was established about six miles east of the present Oak Ridge to accommodate the planters at Prairie Jefferson. It was called Point Jefferson. To keep pace with the rapidly growing community, a post office was established—the first in the settlement—on October 5, 1847. The first postmaster was Grafton D. Dorsey. The post office was known as Point Jefferson. It was discontinued for a brief time in 1857 and again for two years (1866-1868) following the Civil War.

Although Point Jefferson became a prosperous community prior to the Civil War, its population was never large, and it conformed to the general pattern of the state in its agricultural economy and large Negro population. In 1850 Negroes comprised 50.7 per cent of the total population of the state. With regard to population, however, in

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1850 Monroe had only 435 inhabitants, while in 1860 Bastrop boasted only 481 inhabitants.

Baptist Settlement on Oak Ridge

During the two decades 1840-1860, a time of growth and prosperity for Point Jefferson, Baptist ranks were replenished by a remarkable influx of sturdy stock. Thomas Nathanael Barham and his wife, Sallie, progenitors of one of the best known and most widely useful families in Morehouse Parish, came to Prairie Jefferson in the early 1840's. Barham purchased 950 acres of land in 1849, including "Lot No. 4" of the original Prairie Jefferson tract.¹ A part of his land was located just north of the Mound Tract and is now owned by William S. Barham, the great-grandson of Thomas N. and Sallie Barham and a deacon in Oak Ridge Baptist Church. On July 1, 1849, J. D. Carr wrote the following receipt: "Received of Thomas N. Barham one hundred dollars in full, for the clearing and fencing of ten acres of land. . . ." ²

After his marriage to Sallie Barham, who was born in North Carolina on March 5, 1810, Thomas N. Barham resided for a time with his family in Noxubee County, Mississippi, before settling at Prairie Jefferson.³ Gifted and possessed of a genial nature, Barham soon affiliated with the Masonic fraternity in Bastrop and became identified with, and active in, the commercial and political life of the parish. He served the parish as sheriff in the 1850's, and was said to have been "rated as one of the most popular sheriffs that the parish ever had," following the accepted pattern of his day for getting votes, which was "to visit every voter in his home, get acquainted with every man's family and carry

¹ Morehouse Parish Archives, Conveyance Records, Book B, pp. 27-28.

² *Senate Executive Documents* (No. 4, 1852), p. 231.

³ Barham Family Bible, in possession of Lillian Pipes Barham, Oak Ridge.



Left: Elizabeth Wooding Williams (1795-1884).



Right: Thomas Wooding Williams (1822-1891).

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candy to the children in the homes."⁴ After her husband's untimely death, Sallie Barham remained with her family at Oak Ridge, where she died on February 17, 1889, and was buried in the Oak Ridge Baptist Cemetery.

The church was further strengthened by the coming of Alfred Washington Bridgers (1812-1900) and his family in the 1840's. Bridgers, born in North Carolina, devoted practically all of his adult life to the Baptist cause at Oak Ridge. So far as the presently available records reveal, he was the first man known to have served as a deacon of the church and was the first known president of the church's Board of Trustees, positions which he held for a number of decades. Among other things, he helped to stimulate the interest of the church in the denominational life beyond the local scene.

In the 1840's John Williams brought his family to the section of the community now known as Gum Ridge; members of the family have been active in the church continuously from that time to the present. John Williams was born on March 5, 1791, in Pittsylvania County, Virginia.⁵ Serving as a lieutenant in the War of 1812, he was married in 1815 to Elizabeth Wooding, also of Pittsylvania County. Elizabeth Wooding was the daughter of Thomas Hill and Susanna Christopher Wooding, both ardent Virginia Baptists.⁶ John and Elizabeth Wooding Williams moved from Virginia to Hinds County, Mississippi, in a covered wagon, later settling in the Oak Ridge community.

Many of the newcomers to Point Jefferson in the late 1840's and early 1850's began to settle the areas to the west and south of the original Prairie Jefferson tract. One of those

⁴ C. C. Davenport, *Looking Backward: Memoirs of the Early Settlement of Morehouse Parish* (Mer Rouge, La., 1911), p. 34.

⁵ Family Records, photostat in possession of Mrs. J. W. Brodnax, Oak Ridge.

⁶ Wooding Family Bible, in possession of Lessie Madison Garrett, Monroe.

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active in the community as early as the mid-forties was Stephen C. Davis, whose family rendered distinguished service to the church for many decades. Davis soon affiliated with the Masonic fraternity in Bastrop and acquired considerable property, becoming widely known and highly respected throughout the parish. In 1850 Davis recorded the deed to the property on which he then resided, about ninety acres of cleared land, described as being located "on the Oak Ridge."⁷ In those days the country was poorly drained, and there was little control over periodic flooding; hence, the little ridges peeping out above the lowlands attracted settlers and were given names. Soon the ridge west and south of Oak Ridge was called Gum Ridge.

Shortly after 1850 several families from Union Parish took up residence on the Oak Ridge. They were relatives who had come to Union Parish from Alabama about 1840, among them being Frederick and Frances G. Tucker, their son Robert J. Tucker and his wife, Harriet Johnson Tucker, and Dr. Samuel J. and Mary Jane Bass Larkin.⁸ These Baptists with their families settled on property adjacent to, and some partly occupied by, the church and cemetery.

The Church and Cemetery

By the 1840's the population at Point Jefferson had largely shifted to the new center on the Oak Ridge. Baptist families had concentrated in this area, gradually decreasing their numbers along the Gallion, the Bonne Idee, and the original Prairie Jefferson section. It is doubtful whether by the early 1840's Baptists had constructed a church building—the greater likelihood being that they met in homes for worship

⁷ Morehouse Parish, *op. cit.*, Book B, p. 258.

⁸ Family Records, supplied by Tazewell W. Baird, Farmerville, great-grandson of Dr. Larkin; Genealogical Records from collection of Eva Loe McDuffie, Oak Ridge.

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—although it is possible that a log meeting house was erected between the Gallion and the Bonne Idee, perhaps even one where the cemetery now stands.

Baptists became rather numerous by the late forties and early fifties. Most of them habitually used the name Oak Ridge to designate the community; hence it was natural for the church to adopt that name also. Gradually the community accepted the name as its own, although it was not until October 13, 1879, that the name of the post office was officially changed from Point Jefferson to Oak Ridge. Thus, Baptists not only played a significant role in the development of the community but in giving it the names by which it has been known throughout its history.

When was the church now known as Oak Ridge Baptist Church first organized? Various dates have been given in the statistical data furnished associations. It is well known that such information, particularly in the early years, was often unreliable and sometimes misleading. Paxton,⁹ the earliest Louisiana Baptist historian, although he had visited and preached in the church, knew nothing of its origin or date of organization. For many years the records of the church were poorly kept, if at all; and in keeping with prevailing customs, no care was taken to preserve them. The earliest Minutes in the possession of the church begin only with the year 1901. Minutes of various denominational bodies, of course, contain references to the church of a much earlier date.

As conclusive documentary evidence is lacking, it may never be known precisely when the church was formally organized as a church. Presumption favors a date as early as between 1797-1804. The evidence rests in large measure upon the assumption that such devout and experienced

⁹ Paxton, *A History of the Baptists of Louisiana* (1888), pp. 257-58, 335-37.

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Baptists as John Coulter, William Thomas, Prosper King, John Burch, and others would hardly have lived in such close proximity without organizing a church. There were enough Baptists to organize a church; indeed, many churches were organized in other places prior to that date with fewer members. It seems evident, therefore, that Baptists established the first church in existence in the Oak Ridge area.

The church had a precarious existence for many years, but as the population shifted to the Oak Ridge region it was replenished with substantial members who gave it more sustained support. It is apparent that the Baptist Cemetery at Oak Ridge was started when the nucleus of the church became centered in that section. A church building was erected, and the families began to bury their loved ones on the grounds of the church where they worshipped. Although it is possible that a log building was erected earlier, the chances are that the first building on the site of the Baptist Cemetery, the first church building in the community, was erected early in the 1840's. When demolished at the turn of the century, it was described as a "dilapidated" structure. The late Miss Ellie Traylor, who was not a Baptist but worshipped there often, spoke of the distinctive beauty of the building. It was small, since the membership of the church was small; and many families, having moved only recently, were faced with the necessity of building residences for themselves with limited resources and paying for their newly acquired land.

The oldest identifiable graves in the cemetery are of members of the Stephen C. Davis family and date back to 1847 and 1848. Doubtless, numerous old pioneers lie buried there in unmarked graves, for in the early years tombstones were not easily secured, and some could ill afford this expense. Many markers also suffered damage and destruction. It has been commonly reported that casualties of the Civil War on

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both sides were buried in the cemetery in unmarked graves. The church building was undoubtedly used by troops of both North and South as the opposing armies alternately overran the terrain.

Relations with the Denomination

When the center of the Baptist community shifted to the Oak Ridge, the denomination had only begun the nucleus of a statewide organization, and it was largely confined at first to the northcentral and northwestern portions of the state. In like manner, the most accessible association, Concord, covered a vast territory far removed from the scene at Oak Ridge and separated from it by formidable barriers. One scarcely finds the fact surprising that Oak Ridge Baptists in the earliest years chiefly occupied themselves with the strengthening of their home base. Isolated from their neighbors, a small white minority, they faced problems at home as their major concern.

If the early Baptists of Oak Ridge left little written data from which their antiquity could be traced, that aspect of their history may be found to some extent in their artifacts—products of their ingenuity, skill, and industry—fashioned to the unerringly rhythmical beat of the sometimes mournful but carefree songs of their slaves. The oldest buildings now standing in Morehouse Parish and probably in Northeast Louisiana are the residences erected by these Baptist pioneers, enduring monuments to their sturdy character and will to stay. Two old residences built by John and Elizabeth Wooding Williams and members of their family, some of whom were grown and married when the family arrived, are still owned and occupied by their descendants. An imposing antebellum residence erected by the Tuckers stands south of the cemetery. The most elegant old ante-bellum mansion was constructed by Dr. Samuel J. Larkin in 1858.

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Commanding a superb view of the old church and cemetery and overlooking the Oak Ridge-Monroe road, the lovely old two-story mansion was built with lumber milled in Lake Providence and hauled overland by wagon teams manned with slaves. Its picturesque setting at the end of a long avenue studded with moss-covered oaks attracted visitors for generations. Although unoccupied, the building yet stands.

Another handsome old residence was reportedly built soon after the Civil War by J. William Davis, one of the first merchants at Oak Ridge. The son of Stephen C. Davis, he was for decades a useful deacon in the church and a widely known denominational leader. The house is now owned and occupied by another devoted deacon in the church, William M. Nolan, and his family.

After a period of preoccupation with their homes and farming interests, Oak Ridge Baptists became actively associated with the denomination in its larger program. Dr. Samuel J. Larkin, a physician, large slaveholder, and planter, was an ordained Baptist minister, as was his brother W. B. Larkin. Both were active in the Baptist ministry throughout Concord Association, which at first comprised not only Union Parish but about all of Northeast Louisiana. It was probably largely through the influence of these two men that the Oak Ridge Church affiliated with Concord Association. Drawn to the community through family connections and a desire to purchase land, Dr. Larkin also served as a missionary of Concord Association, while W. B. Larkin served as a missionary of the Louisiana Baptist Convention in Concord Association in 1851 and as pastor of the church at Bastrop.¹⁰

The first time the church affiliated with an association ap-

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 258-59, 431.

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pears to have been in 1849, when it was received at the meeting of Concord Association with Bayou Bartholomew Baptist Church, near Point Pleasant, in Morehouse Parish. Paxton, referring to the Minutes of that meeting, simply identified the church as "Morehouse Church, in Morehouse Parish."¹¹ Jonathan Newman preached the introductory sermon at that meeting; Dr. Larkin was elected moderator; W. B. Larkin, clerk. Plainly, the church referred to was Oak Ridge, since Bartholomew was the place of meeting and had been active in the association from the time Concord Association was organized in 1832. The church referred to could not have been Bastrop (the only other possibility), as that church was received at the associational meeting in October, 1851, two years later.¹²

Sometime between 1850 and 1854, Oak Ridge Baptist Church affiliated with Bartholomew Association in Arkansas. This association was comprised principally of churches in southeastern Arkansas, bordering Louisiana. It proved more accessible for both Oak Ridge and Bastrop for a time, as the inconvenience of crossing the Ouachita River was eliminated, not a small consideration for those whose means of travel was horseback.

The church was already a member of Bartholomew Association in 1854, but no messengers from the church were present at that meeting of the association. A church contribution of \$2.50 was sent to help defray the cost of the Minutes, and a letter was sent giving statistical data. The church was identified as Oak Ridge Baptist Church in Morehouse Parish, Louisiana. It listed a membership of eighteen and reported four additions by letter during the associational year 1853-1854.¹³ In 1854, according to the oldest availa-

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 258.

¹³ Bartholomew Baptist Association (Ark.), *Minutes* 1854; in the collection at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville.

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ble Membership Roll, Mary Elizabeth Williams Dix was baptized into the fellowship of the church.¹⁴ She was a daughter of John and Elizabeth Wooding Williams.

In what year the church began its affiliation with the Louisiana Baptist Convention is uncertain, although in 1857 it was among the churches cooperating with the convention. The convention met at Mt. Lebanon in July of 1857, when the Oak Ridge Baptist Church was represented only by letter and funds. There is a record of the church's contribution of \$5.00 that year for the work of the convention.¹⁵

When Baptist growth warranted the organization of another association in North Louisiana, Bayou Macon Baptist Association was constituted in 1855, serving the vast area between the Ouachita and Mississippi rivers. Oak Ridge affiliated with this association prior to 1859, for in that year it was listed among the cooperating churches when Bayou Macon met with the Macedonia Church in Carroll Parish.¹⁶

The church continued to prosper during this period and exerted a steady and salutary influence over the social and moral life of the community. Always kindly disposed in its feelings for other denominations, the church freely offered its facilities when needed and in a spirit of brotherly love unfailingly provided burial ground for those of other faiths or of no faith. Typical of the breadth of view and tolerance which characterized the members, who shunned proselytizing or building on another's foundation, A. W. and N. Bridgers donated land in 1858 for the Gallion Union Church.¹⁷

Entertaining the Association

Such was the growth of the church by 1859 that in the

¹⁴ Oak Ridge Baptist Church, Minute Book I, Membership Roll. This roll contains only the records of members who were yet living in 1901.

¹⁵ Louisiana Baptist Convention, *Annual* 1857, pp. 3, 20.

¹⁶ Paxton, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

¹⁷ Morehouse Parish, *op. cit.*, Book D, p. 608.

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fall of that year it felt strong enough to invite Bayou Macon Association to meet at Oak Ridge in 1860. Oddly enough, the reported strength of the church in 1860 was only twenty-six members.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the church had reached higher ground. The strength of the church at that time can hardly be appraised from any statistical information available. Not only is this due to the general laxity in the matter of keeping records in those years but to certain practical considerations and theological presuppositions.

Theologically, Baptists have always insisted upon the baptism of believers only; but in 1860 this was sometimes mistakenly construed to mean adults only. Baptists never practiced infant baptism. Therefore, the membership numbered only the adults generally, regardless of the size of families represented in the church. The hortatory tone of the preaching, which magnified a legalistic morality, often quite inadvertently encouraged individuals to await the "sowing of their wild oats" before baptism; this usually meant deferring baptism until after marriage, sometimes even old age. There were many who supported the church but who failed to accept baptism. Infrequent ministerial appointments—plus the fact that for years there was no baptistry in the church, and the administration of the ordinance was accompanied by some inconvenience—caused others to defer baptism.

If the church seemed statistically weak, it showed no lack of generosity or enthusiasm. For months before the associational meeting in October of 1860, preparations were being made to entertain the gathering, anticipated as the largest in the history of Oak Ridge up to that date. And it was just that.

At its meeting at Mt. Lebanon in the summer of 1860, the state convention had elected representatives to attend the

¹⁸ Louisiana Convention, *Annual* 1870, p. 26.

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association at Oak Ridge.¹⁹ According to custom various neighboring associations, with which Bayou Macon was in correspondence, sent fraternal messengers. Churches throughout the northeastern portion of the state were represented. Of course, none in Oak Ridge expected to miss the festivities of that grand occasion.

The association lasted for four days, according to the custom of that time, and many guests coming from a great distance probably arrived Friday and departed Wednesday. But such was the warmth of their hospitality that the homes of the entire population opened freely and gladly; and there was considerable friendly competition for the guests, especially the more popular preachers, many of whom had preached at stated intervals along the way for days prior to their arrival. The well-located, well-established families—the Larkins, the Tuckers, and the Williamses—undoubtedly entertained twenty or thirty or even more visitors, as such was not at all uncommon in that day.

Much of the time during the sessions of the association was occupied with preaching; the sermons were usually at least an hour in length. To accommodate the vast audiences preaching services were conducted outside the church, under the spreading trees, while the business of the association went on inside, often at a snail's pace, for there was much lively debate participated in by the eager messengers.

Such an association served an educational purpose, because reading material was not always readily available; and the reading of the annual circular letter, devoted usually to a doctrinal subject, proved to be a high hour. The association was a means of communication among those who had few opportunities to travel and acquaint themselves with the news of the day and the thoughts of their neigh-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, *Annual* 1860, p. 12.

HIGHER GROUND

bors. Its social purposes found expression in communication, fellowship, and fraternization and bore fruit in the cementing and welding together of an important segment of the denomination.

Dinner on the church grounds was an important event. The slaves, supervised especially by one of their number who was a barbecue specialist, were at work before dawn preparing the barbecued beef and pork. The noonday meals defied description. They included wild turkey, venison, squirrel, fish, quail, and ham, and tender young chickens fried to a golden brown by the household servants, who were as eager participants in the gaiety of the occasion as the most distinguished guests and felt quite as important. There was no lack of food: sweet potatoes dripping with real butter freshly churned; cakes; pumpkin, sweet potato, and custard pies—a favorite with the men—and even buttermilk for the homesick or perhaps those who had overeaten the day before.

When the day's session ended and the guests had been escorted to their temporary homes by gallant hosts, the men sat around the hearthsides on those crisp October evenings smoking their pipes or an occasional cigar and, encouraged by the crackling fires casting their eerie shadows from the mammoth fireplaces, exchanged stories of their fortunes throughout the past year until the spell of that friendly setting caused them to nod in their chairs. With the coming of dawn they were greeted with coffee, immense platters of bacon, sausage, ham, and eggs, mounds of butter, molasses, and huge trays of fat, hot biscuits with preserves and jellies. A festive air delighted the children as well as the beaming cooks, who glowed with pride at every mention of their culinary skill.

This occasion was talked of long after the joyful singing and extending of the "parting hand" gave the signal for

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the visitors to make preparations for their return journeys. Still, it was true that, in spite of the merrymaking, a dark cloud hung furtively over the gathering. The men had spoken of it somberly, in small groups with hushed tones. Heavy-hearted and with drawn faces, they had agonized often in devout prayer for divine guidance throughout the associational meeting. Within a month Lincoln would be elected; within three months Louisiana would secede from the Union. The ugly specter of catastrophic national events struck the only discordant note. None could have foreseen the awful tragedy before them: events so fearful that it would be a decade before the association could gather the broken fragments and start again. Something died that day in Oak Ridge —something that was lost forever. But something was born *[thus it is always]*, for a new awareness of the sufficiency of God's grace had gripped the souls of those present; and it was to be a healing balm in the troubled days ahead.

CHAPTER VII

THE ROD AND STAFF OF COMFORT

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow . . .
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

—Ps. 23:4

*Behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his
own.*

—James Russell Lowell

OAK RIDGE BAPTISTS endured cruel suffering during and following the Civil War. But with characteristic resiliency, however, as true soldiers of Jesus Christ, they soon recouped their losses and within a few years became stronger than ever.

The war brought numerous skirmishes in the neighborhood, for at times the general area lay between the lines of the opposing armies and was alternately plundered by both sides. Levees were cut, fine plantations laid waste, and much of the region almost depopulated. Many families fled as refugees to other areas, some taking their slaves and what few possessions they could along with them. Churches were naturally disorganized, as the country presented a wide scene of desolation. In 1870 the corresponding secretary of the state convention reported that there was "no more inviting field for missionary labor" in the state than the one within the territory of Bayou Macon Association.¹

Civil War Years

During the first years of the Civil War, the church made heroic efforts to maintain its services. From 1860 to 1862

¹ Louisiana Baptist Convention, *Annual* 1870, p. 15.

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the church was served by Carroll Clark, a minister whose rare courage and faithfulness to duty in the face of grave dangers did much to inspire confidence when the community was threatened. Clark represented the state convention as a missionary to Bayou Macon Association in 1861. He reported an accelerated church attendance, deeper religious feeling, and "a disposition to erect more suitable houses of worship."² While at Oak Ridge, Clark became a member of the local Masonic Lodge.³

Among the losses sustained were several prominent men who died in the early 1860's. The funeral of Dr. A. P. Myers, attended by a "large concourse of friends and relatives," was conducted at the church on October 25, 1860.⁴ At 11 A.M. on January 27, 1861, the funeral of John R. Williams was conducted at Oak Ridge Baptist Church. The son of John and Elizabeth Wooding Williams, he was a Mason, and Masonic rites were held at the grave.⁵ A deep sense of loss was felt at the death of Asberry Bernard Conger, whose funeral was conducted at the church on January 5, 1862.⁶ He had come to the community from Clinton, Mississippi. At his death he left a small son who bore his name and who was later popularly called "Mr. Bun."

By the spring of 1863, the community felt increasing fear over the danger of invasion; not a few faced the necessity of fleeing from their homes. Indeed, an enemy invasion disrupted the life of the community between the summer of 1863 and the spring of 1864.⁷ The resulting confusion and despair wrought heavy damage upon the life of the church. A visitor to the community in September, 1864, reported

² Paxton, *A History of the Baptists of Louisiana* (1888), pp. 444-45.

³ Brookville Lodge No. 161, F. & A. M. (Oak Ridge), Minute Book I, pp. 19-31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-35.

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the prevalence of much apprehension about enemy reprisals for guerilla activities. On September 27, 1864, she wrote in her diary: "We all rode up to Oak Ridge to church but there was no preacher."⁸

Much heartache, as well as repeated discouragement, accompanied efforts to rebuild the work. At the close of hostilities, Baptists began to survey the damage, gather up the tattered fragments, and start again. According to existing records, among the new members baptized following the war were W. D. Whetstone, in 1866, and Elizabeth Bridgers, in 1868.⁹

Church and Cemetery Property

Originally, the church building and cemetery were located on land not owned by the church. Members of the Tucker family at various times held title to the property.¹⁰ In the aftermath of the Civil War, repeated economic reverses caused the financial ruin of many; thus, the property of Frederick Tucker, which at that time included the land on which the church and cemetery were located, was seized for sale. The church, therefore, with the consent of the interested litigants, purchased the 4.82 acres in which it had an interest. The deed was recorded in February, 1870, by Alfred W. Bridgers, President of the Trustees, who acted for the church in the negotiations.¹¹ Within a few years the church acquired additional land by donations from Dr. S. J. Larkin and his son Porter J. Larkin.¹² A small portion of land adjacent to the cemetery was acquired from F. A. Evans in 1925.¹³

After the church acquired title to its original 4.82 acres,

⁸ John Q. Anderson (ed.), *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), p. 300.

⁹ Oak Ridge Baptist Church, Minute Book I, Membership Roll.

¹⁰ Morehouse Parish Archives, Conveyance Records, Book G, p. 121.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Book I, p. 106.

¹² *Ibid.*, Book L, p. 705; Book M, p. 274.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Book 53, pp. 9-11.

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a more efficient, businesslike administration of the cemetery property seemed to require the services of a distinct body incorporated for that purpose. A legal instrument, "Incorporation of Oak Ridge Baptist Cemetery for 100 Years," was therefore filed at the courthouse in Bastrop on October 1, 1870.¹⁴ The following served as the first trustees: J. M. Huffman, M. K. Larkin, George W. Dannals, Wilson G. Myers, B. W. Wright, J. J. Read, and J. F. Madison. On March 6, 1871, Alfred W. Bridgers, President of the Trustees of the church, acted for the church in transferring title to the property, which was vested in John M. Huffman, President of the Trustees of the cemetery.¹⁵

The action of the church, partly inspired from the beginning by a desire to provide a common burial-ground for the neighbors who lived together, perhaps had its intention at least partially fulfilled in the dearth of insignia on the monuments. One searches vainly among the graves for the denominational preferences (necessary as they seem to be in this world) of the fallen. But all rest together: alike, free in death from the creedal distinctions so often made in life as part of a profane search for prestige and pre-eminence in an all too secularized society. Motivated by pride, one bursting through the big door to the "one true church" may miss the little window which sheds light upon the one true faith.

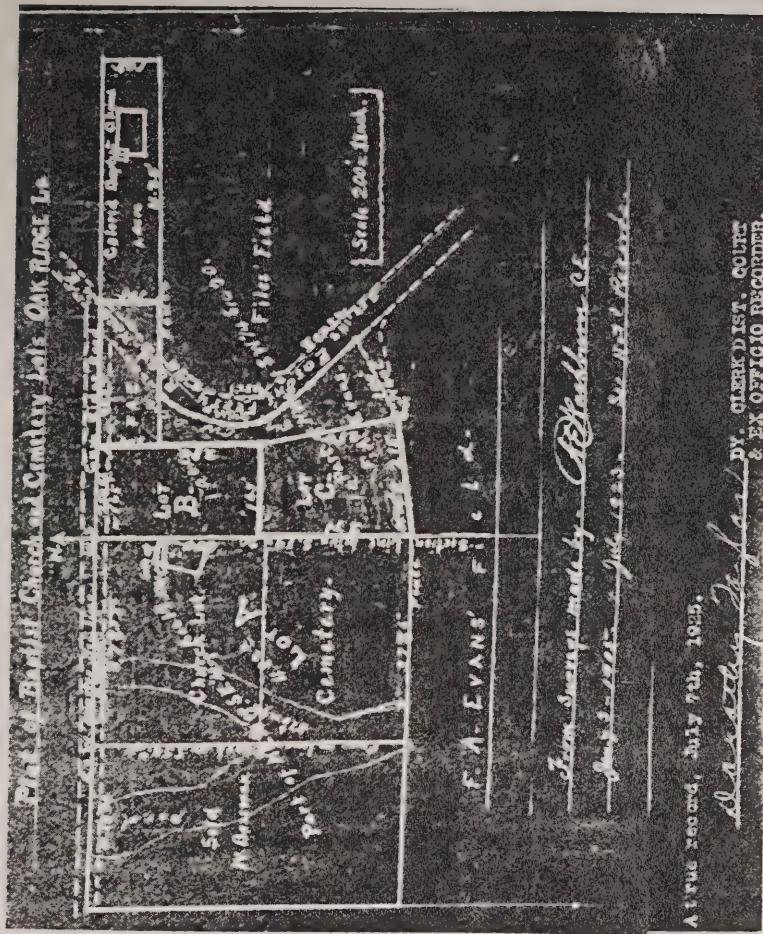
Revival and Growth

Several ministers merited recognition for the time they devoted to the church and for their part in its phenomenal growth especially in the difficult period of the Reconstruction. Among these ministers were Dr. S. J. Larkin, Dr. N. F. McGraw, Dr. George Boardman Eager, and R. S. Jackson.

Samuel J. Larkin was born in Wilmington, North Carolina,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Book I, p. 132.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 266.



Plat of Oak Ridge Baptist Church Cemetery property. Indicates site of old church building. Plat reproduced from original in Morehouse Parish Conveyance Records, Book 53, page 11.

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about 1798. Awarded the Doctor of Medicine degree in New York at the age of twenty-two, he removed to Alabama, where he practiced for a number of years. He was married to Mary Jane Bass, whose two sisters married C. T. Barton and Elias George, the latter a minister long prominent in Baptist circles in North Louisiana. After his ordination to the Baptist ministry, Dr. Larkin came to Louisiana with members of his family and his wife's family, settling in Union Parish about 1840. Larkin spent about the last three decades of his life at Oak Ridge, where he died in 1882 and was buried beside his wife in the Baptist Cemetery. Although in his later years he gave up the practice of medicine, and the infirmities of age and a persistent cough forced him to retire from the active ministry, a great number of churches in Union and Morehouse parishes stand as monuments to his memory.¹⁶

For some years Dr. Larkin was the only resident minister at Oak Ridge. He rendered valuable service to the community in solemnizing marriages and officiating at funerals. A man of considerable means, he gave generous support to the church; his home was always hospitable, always open especially to visiting ministers. His wise counsel and able leadership proved invaluable to the church. In the association, which he attended as his health permitted, he was deferred to and offered a place of honor in the deliberations. He also took an interest in the state convention, attending the session at Shiloh, in Union Parish, as late as 1878.¹⁷

In the early 1870's the church experienced the most remarkable revival and growth in its history up to that time. While Dr. N. F. McGraw was pastor, he joined George B. Eager in evangelistic work throughout the association in the summer of 1870. In 1871 R. S. Jackson resided at Oak Ridge

¹⁶ Louisiana Baptist Convention, *Annual* 1882.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *Annual* 1878.

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and served the association as missionary, cooperating with Dr. McGraw, pastor at Oak Ridge, in his evangelistic efforts. T. W. Williams, church clerk in 1870, reported only two baptisms and eight additions by letter in that year; but in 1871 there were thirty-two baptisms and thirteen additions otherwise. According to J. William Davis, church clerk, the membership of the church reached the amazing total of seventy-two in 1871.¹⁸

N. F. McGraw served the church as pastor when all the churches in the association were quarter-time—Oak Ridge had worship services the first Sunday in each month. McGraw was born in Tennessee in 1828. For a number of years he lived in Alabama, coming in 1858 to Louisiana, where for a considerable time he practiced the profession of dentistry and served also as a Methodist minister. It was "after a long and conscientious investigation" that he was baptized into the fellowship of the Baptist church at Bastrop in 1867. He was ordained to the Baptist ministry in 1868, accepting the pastorate at Oak Ridge shortly afterward and later serving other churches, including Rayville and Delhi, where he was pastor at the time of his death in 1874. An "able and effective minister," Dr. McGraw served both the association and the state convention in important capacities. His early death was doubtless hastened "by his insatiate desire to fill every appointment," often at the cost of great pain and weariness. One biographer said of this noble pastor:

... Generous to a fault, he often wronged himself and family by not claiming the just remuneration of his toil; for he wrought diligently with his hands as a dentist, often to the close of the sixth day, and then on the seventh spoke for God. . . .¹⁹

¹⁸ Bayou Macon Association, *Minutes* 1870; *Minutes* 1871.

¹⁹ Louisiana Baptist Convention, *Annual* 1874, pp. 23-24; also see Paxton, *op. cit.*, pp. 509-10.

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The church was considerably broadened in its concepts of Christian education and the missionary enterprise through the ministry of R. S. Jackson, who lived at Oak Ridge for some time. Jackson was born on Old River, near the mouth of Red River, in 1844. Reared by an aunt, he was educated at Mt. Lebanon University and the State Seminary at Alexandria, where he was in school when he enlisted in the Confederate Army at the age of sixteen. Attaining the rank of First Lieutenant, he received the wound which eventually caused his death while engaged in battle in Virginia in 1862.

While his wound was yet unhealed, Jackson returned to Louisiana and was captured by the enemy as he was engaged with the advance guard of General Banks up the Red River. He succeeded in overpowering his guard and seizing the vessel on which he was being taken to Fort Delaware. Aided by friendly hands, he made good his escape but resigned his commission in the Infantry because of his inability to walk. Jackson then joined the Cavalry and rose to the rank of Captain in Company D, Louisiana Cavalry, in which he served until the end of the war.

When stationed at Minden, Jackson met Viola Roscoe—daughter of William Roscoe, of Bossier Parish—whom he married in 1864. A lady of fine literary attainments and highly cultured, she later gained distinction in the field of Southern Literature.

Following the war, Jackson pursued a teaching career for a time, being associated with W. E. Paxton at Minden Male Academy. He later served as president of Homer Female College and also edited a literary paper. After retiring to his plantation near Cheneyville, Jackson was baptized and licensed to preach by Beulah Baptist Church. He preached his first sermon in French. After going to Clinton as tutor in Mississippi College, he was ordained, returning to Louisiana

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later to serve as Corresponding Secretary and Agent of the Ministerial Education Board.

In January, 1872, while serving as a missionary of Bayou Macon Association, Jackson was called as pastor at Oak Ridge. He also served Bastrop and Hurricane. He resigned in the fall of 1873 in order to enter Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, which was then located at Greenville, South Carolina, where he died in 1874 as a result of complications arising from his old war wound.²⁰

Closely associated with McGraw and Jackson in the revival and progress of the work at Oak Ridge was George B. Eager, who added immeasurably to the evangelistic zeal of the church. Eager was born near Rodney, Mississippi, in 1847 and served in the Confederate Army. He was graduated from both Mississippi College and Southern Baptist Seminary. During the interregna of those school years in the early 1870's, he served the churches at Oak Ridge and Bastrop, in Louisiana, as well as Lake Village, Arkansas. Eager later became pastor of some of the most distinguished churches in the South. A gifted writer, he also taught at Southern Seminary from 1900 to 1920, retiring as the Seminary's first professor emeritus. Dr. Eager was married to Anna Banks Coor-Pender, of Jackson, Mississippi, in 1879. He died at Jacksonville, Florida, in 1929.²¹

Denominational Loyalty

The remarkable quality of the pastoral leadership of Oak Ridge Baptists tended, in the period following the Civil War, to incline the church toward the forging of unbreakable ties with the denomination. One of the outstanding events in the history of the community occurred when the annual

²⁰ Louisiana Baptist Convention, *Annual* 1875, pp. 32-33; also see Paxton, *op. cit.*, pp. 506-7.

²¹ Gaines S. Dobbins, "Eager, George Boardman," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, I, 382.

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session of the Louisiana Baptist Convention was held with Oak Ridge Baptist Church from June 30 to July 3, 1871. Originally scheduled for Monroe, the convention meeting place was changed to Oak Ridge after the Executive Board had "received letters from the ministering brethren at Monroe." They stated that the church there "was too feeble, under existing circumstances, to sustain" such a gathering. The change to Oak Ridge was suggested at the request of Oak Ridge Baptists.²²

In addition to the representatives from various churches and associations throughout the state, the convention attracted delegations from Arkansas and Mississippi and included the following distinguished visitors: Dr. J. R. Graves, of Tennessee; T. C. Teasdale, Corresponding Secretary of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention; T. H. Morgan, District Secretary of the Sunday School Board; E. C. Eager, father of the celebrated George B. Eager and District Secretary of the Board of Domestic Missions of the Southern Baptist Convention. Among the important actions of the convention was the creation of a Board of Domestic Missions. The success of the convention—of which it took note in suitable resolutions—in no small measure was due to the hospitality offered by the homes of the entire community. The convention also voted thanks "to the North Louisiana and Texas Railroad for returning the members of the Convention free."²³

Oak Ridge continued to maintain a steady interest in the work of the convention. In 1873 R. S. Jackson, pastor of the church, preached the Convention Sermon; again in 1879 the pastor, L. C. Kellis, preached the Sermon. Others from Oak Ridge, in addition to the pastors, who attended the convention during the period and served on important commit-

²² Louisiana Baptist Convention, *Annual* 1871, pp. 8, 21.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

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tees from time to time included Thomas G. Brigham, who founded a parish newspaper, the *Morehouse Sentinel*, in 1884 (incorporated into the *Clarion* in 1888-1889);²⁴ also, Dr. S. J. Larkin, A. W. Bridgers, F. P. Bridgers, J. William Davis, E. L. Huffman, J. F. Madison, W. D. Whetstone, and T. W. Williams.

Oak Ridge Baptists from the beginning maintained a sympathetic interest in the work of the Southern Baptist Convention, although their isolation and the formidable barriers to travel discouraged active participation for many years. In 1872 the Louisiana Baptist Convention elected R. S. Jackson and Thomas G. Brigham, both Oak Ridge Baptists, to represent that body at the next annual session of the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting at Mobile, Alabama. After L. C. Kellis became pastor of the church, he attended the session of the Southern Baptist Convention at Atlanta, Georgia, in 1879 and was appointed to the Committee on New Fields of the Foreign Mission Board.²⁵ In 1880, when the convention met at Lexington, Kentucky, Kellis served on the Committee on Foreign Missions.

Lewis C. Kellis was born in Mississippi and educated at Mississippi College. In 1874 he removed to Louisiana and served, in addition to Oak Ridge, churches at Alto, Delhi, Rayville, Bastrop, and Trenton. He later went to Texas and served a church in Houston. Described as an "elegant writer," he contributed widely to denominational papers.²⁶

Denominational meetings on the associational level always excited intense interest among, and elicited a very enthusiastic response from, Oak Ridge Baptists. The annual session of the association offered a meeting place for old acquaintances, had a social appeal, and provided a forum for

²⁴ *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Louisiana* (1892), II, 191.

²⁵ Southern Baptist Convention, *Annual* 1879.

²⁶ Paxton, *op. cit.*, pp. 547-48.

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the expression of personal convictions. These meetings helped to develop Baptist individualism; they were adapted to the recognition of laymen and encouraged lay participation in the shaping of denominational policy and points of view.

Thus in 1871, Oak Ridge Baptists were overjoyed at the opportunity to entertain two tremendous Baptist gatherings, for both the state convention and the association met with the church that year. Following the state convention in the summer, Bayou Macon Association convened at Oak Ridge September 29-October 2, 1871. Deacons A. W. Bridgers and W. D. Whetstone took their responsibilities seriously as they joined the pastor in the work of the "Committee on Preaching." Other committees on which Oak Ridge laymen served were the following: Education, W. D. Whetstone; Sunday Schools, A. W. Bridgers; Temperance, G. W. Mott. These men officially represented the church as messengers at that meeting.²⁷

George W. Mott was married on May 10, 1870, to Ada Gardner, the ceremony being witnessed by G. W. McDuffie, J. T. Myers, and J. W. Sharp.²⁸ Active in support of the church, Mott also served as an officer in the local Masonic Lodge; his early death in 1872 grieved the entire community. The Masons spoke of him as one "whose Masonic jewels of relief and truth shone bright and were worn with so much honor to himself and credit to the Craft."²⁹ The association in 1872 noted that Oak Ridge Baptists had "suffered a severe loss by the death of three beloved brethren."³⁰ Mott left a young widow and an infant son, George Emmett Mott, who was a lifelong resident of Oak Ridge. G. E. Mott married

²⁷ Bayou Macon Association, *Minutes* 1871.

²⁸ Morehouse Parish Archives, Marriage Records, Book A (1868-1874); see Eva Loe McDuffie's typescript copy in Ouachita Parish Library, Monroe.

²⁹ Brookville Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

³⁰ Bayou Macon Association, *Minutes* 1872.

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Purity Woodard, member of a pioneer Baptist family in North Louisiana. Two of the children of Emmett and Purity Mott yet retain membership in Oak Ridge Baptist Church: Dr. George Emmett Mott, Jr., a Baton Rouge dentist, and Dr. Marshall Mott, also a dentist, of Monroe. A daughter, Miss Ada Mott, is an attorney in Baton Rouge, where she also works actively in the First Baptist Church.

In the spring of 1876 the church called Charles B. Freeman as pastor. A young man who had studied for the Methodist ministry, he became a Baptist and was graduated from Mississippi College. Shortly after his marriage, he came to Oak Ridge for his first pastorate, in conjunction with Bastrop. In the fall of 1877 Freeman accepted the presidency of Concord Institute, a Baptist institution located at Shiloh, in Union Parish. He later served as a state missionary. Subsequently returning to Mississippi, he established Steen's Creek High School and eventually became president of Kavanaugh College.³¹

When the association met again at Oak Ridge in 1877, the church had a membership of seventy-six and a new pastor, Ivan M. Wise. The church was one of two in the entire association that had half-time services, the Sundays for services at Oak Ridge being the first and third in each month. An interesting feature of that session of the association was that, after the preaching service on Sunday night, the church observed the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. The occasion—from today's point of view, extraordinary for an association—was described as follows:

This was a blessed privilege; solemn and impressive, and brought vividly to the mind that doleful night when our blessed Jesus 'took bread and blessed it'. . . .³²

³¹ Foster, *Mississippi Baptist Preachers* (1895), pp. 277-79.
³² Bayou Macon Association, *Minutes* 1877.

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Contrary to popular misconceptions, Baptists are in agreement with all other Christian denominations in specifying that only baptized believers may participate in the Lord's Supper. They differ with some on the definition of Christian baptism. The Baptist position is that autonomous local churches have custody of the ordinances. Oak Ridge Baptists acknowledge the right of the local church to state the qualifications expected of prospective members, whom it may accept or reject, as well as to define the conditions for participation in the Lord's Supper. Oak Ridge Baptist Church, however, passes the elements of the Lord's Supper without comment from pulpit or pew designed to coerce, violate, or offend the conscience of the believer. The church does not presume to censor the communication between a believer and his Lord—a communication unseen, unheard, and unread without, but experienced and interpreted within, the heart of the believer.

Progress in Christian Education

Wider contacts with mature denominational leaders helped to create an atmosphere within the church which encouraged a broader view of Christian education. Dr. S. J. Larkin exerted a wholesome influence in this direction, having been elected in 1852 a member of the first Board of Trustees of Mt. Lebanon University. This Baptist institution, located at Mt. Lebanon, helped to supply the pressing need for a better-educated ministry.³³ The predecessor of Louisiana College, Mt. Lebanon attracted a number of students from Oak Ridge.

In the early 1870's Mt. Lebanon experienced financial difficulties. The pastor at Oak Ridge, R. S. Jackson, provided leadership for a movement, endorsed by the state conven-

³³ Louisiana Baptist Convention, *Annual* 1852, pp. 17-18.

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tion, whereby Louisiana Baptists cooperated for a time with Mississippi College. The objective was to supply adequate educational facilities for young Louisiana ministers. Jackson served on the Board of Trustees of Mississippi College and was president of the Ministerial Education Board of Louisiana Baptists. Bayou Macon Association shared the state convention's interest and maintained a Committee on Ministerial Education. Pastors at Oak Ridge worked tirelessly on this committee; Dr. N. F. McGraw served as chairman, and later Dr. Ivan M. Wise accepted the position. After his pastorate at Oak Ridge, Dr. Wise became president of Ohio Valley College, did home mission work in Louisiana, and wrote a pamphlet, *Footsteps of the Flock*, dealing with the history of Louisiana Baptists.

An accelerated educational emphasis bore fruit at Oak Ridge. A Sunday school was organized for the church by representatives of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, when the state convention met with Oak Ridge Baptists in 1871.³⁴ One of the first in Northeast Louisiana, it has existed continuously to the present time. A committee of the association proudly reported to that body in the fall of 1871 that at Oak Ridge "we find an interesting Sabbath school in successful operation."³⁵ The association was asked the following year by its Committee on Sabbath Schools, of which A. W. Bridgers from Oak Ridge was a member, to secure the services of a missionary "to preach to the destitute and advocate this Sabbath school cause."³⁶

Oak Ridge took the lead in the association by electing a superintendent for its Sunday school. Elijah Liter Huffman had been elected to this position at least by 1877, the first year the church records noted such a position. In 1879 the

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Annual 1871, p. 27.

³⁵ Bayou Macon Association, *Minutes* 1871, p. 10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, *Minutes* 1872, p. 8.

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Sunday school reported only four officers and teachers and twenty pupils in attendance; Sunday school "papers taken"—the literature used—numbered thirty-five. The Sunday school contributed in 1878 toward the building of a Baptist church in Rome and in 1879 gave five dollars to state missions. The pastors of the church influenced the development of the Sunday school movement throughout the state. In 1872 R. S. Jackson precipitated convention action to promote a Sunday School Institute, made up of representatives from Sunday schools over the state and held at the next convention. He also urged statistical reporting from the various schools. In 1879 L. C. Kellis gave the convention report on Sunday schools.

The church's emphasis on Christian education was further reflected in its actions to secure a state denominational paper. As early as 1871, Dr. N. F. McGraw addressed an appeal to the churches of the association to use Baptist literature and urged the association to put before the state convention its feeling of deep need for a state Baptist paper.³⁷ The appeal was not lost, for in 1879 L. C. Kellis, pastor at Oak Ridge, served as chairman of the state convention's Committee on the Establishment of a State Paper.³⁸

Developing Missionary Concern

As the church broadened its educational horizons, its missionary vision increased, and its gifts for missionary enterprises increased correspondingly. Thus, in 1870 the church sent \$2.50 for associational work; in 1871, \$12; and in 1872, \$27.75. During these years, the church had a part in the organization of a number of new churches within the territory of Bayou Macon Association. These included the church at

³⁷ *Ibid.*, *Minutes* 1871, p. 8.

³⁸ Louisiana Baptist Convention, *Annual* 1879.

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Rayville, one at Girard, and Magnolia Baptist Church in Franklin Parish.

Within the framework of the state convention, the Baptists at Oak Ridge supported all the missionary causes, although there was no unified system of giving such as the Cooperative Program affords today, and appeals for individual causes were made largely on an emotional basis. In 1872, for example, R. S. Jackson was made chairman of the state convention's Committee on Domestic Missions, when he pledged \$50.00 and Thomas G. Brigham, of Oak Ridge, pledged \$25.00 for that cause. Each of these men also pledged \$10.00 for foreign missions. The church contributed \$5.00 toward the work of the convention, while the same amount was given by "Mrs. Tucker, Oak Ridge." She was doubtless Annie Tucker, who was baptized in 1871, the wife of Fred M. Tucker.³⁹ The family had been prominent in the church for many years. This was one of the early references to the participation of women in the work of such denominational bodies. In 1873 Jackson pledged \$100 for state missions—an example of sacrificial giving. But the convention met in 1874 after "a year of panics, and floods, and drouths," when the church was not represented, although in subsequent years it gave liberally to all convention causes.⁴⁰

In 1877 E. L. Huffman joined other representatives from Oak Ridge in attending the state convention. Huffman participated enthusiastically in the work of the local church and the various denominational bodies. His daughter, Miss Lucile Huffman, yet resides at Oak Ridge. Huffman was appointed to the Committee on Foreign Missions, whose report stated that "our work will not be completed until Jesus shall reign in all the earth" and recommended a monthly "concert of

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Annual 1872; also see Oak Ridge Baptist Church, Minute Book I, Membership Roll.

⁴⁰ Louisiana Baptist Convention, *Annual* 1874.

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prayer," the reading of the Foreign Mission Journal, an annual collection for foreign missions, and the organization of "Ladies Missionary Societies." ⁴¹

Social Awareness

Following the Civil War and with the resumption of the annual meetings of Bayou Macon Association, religious conditions among the Negroes greatly concerned the churches. The pastor at Oak Ridge, Dr. N. F. McGraw, in 1871 acted as chairman of the association's Committee on the Religious Condition of the Blacks. He spoke of the "great religious zeal" of the Negroes, stating that in many places their organizations were "used for political purposes," and suggested that Baptists take steps to "organize them into regular churches and associations." ⁴² At that session a Negro Baptist Church in Delhi presented a letter with greetings and a report of its work. After the most courteous attention and devout deliberation, the association decided that the organizations should be kept separate "in order to maintain the same harmony and union of feeling that now exists" and "to promote their interest as well as our own." ⁴³

On August 24, 1872, twelve Negro Baptist churches, supplied with Negro ministers, were organized into the Ouachita and Bayou Macon Colored Association. These churches had 1,220 members. ⁴⁴ At the meeting of Bayou Macon Association in the fall of that year, the Negro association was formally recognized and its fraternal messengers received.

Baptists at Oak Ridge gave encouragement to the organizations of the Negroes and assisted them in every way possible. The first Negro church at Oak Ridge came into existence largely through the generosity of Dr. S. J. Larkin. He

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Annual 1877.

⁴² Bayou Macon Association, *Minutes* 1871, p. 9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, *Minutes* 1872, p. 9.

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made a donation of land to the "Colored Baptist Church of Oak Ridge." This donation, made in 1872, stipulated that no "radical minister, teacher, or lecturer" should be allowed to teach or preach in the building on pain of forfeiture of the property.⁴⁵

A national movement against the saloons was reflected in the association by a growing temperance agitation. The Report on Temperance was presented to the association in 1877 by J. William Davis, chairman, and signed also by E. L. Huffman and F. P. Bridgers, all from Oak Ridge. Adopted by the association, the report urged the churches to "keep the Lord's house pure" and, "as faithful stewards of the Master, to guard the house of the living God with a jealous eye in regard to intemperance, drunkenness and dram-drinking"; it further urged withdrawal of fellowship "from intemperate dram-drinkers and drunkards." Oddly enough, the back of the association's printed Minutes for that year contained business advertisements of firms in Monroe and Vicksburg. These advertisements promised, "Liberal Prices Paid for Cotton." They offered shawls, boots, Gullet's Cotton Gins, Milburn Wagons, general plantation supplies; and one of them urged the purchase of "Groceries, Provisions and Liquors."⁴⁶ Doubtless in that day, as now, orthodoxy lent itself to rhetoric more easily than orthopraxy. Or was it that rhetoric proved less painful to frame than the more exacting rectitude of conduct?

The conditions following the Civil War—problems of social adjustment and grave economic burdens—offered no encouragement to the church. Oak Ridge Baptists, nonetheless, proved equal to the task. One of their number, Thomas Wooding Williams, served in the Louisiana Legislature. A man of deep faith, long active in the church as deacon,

⁴⁵ Morehouse Parish Archives, Conveyance Records, Book I, p. 557.

⁴⁶ Bayou Macon Association, *Minutes* 1877.

THE ROD AND STAFF OF COMFORT

church clerk, and in other responsible positions, he maintained a wholesome interest in, and contributed wisely to, the civic life of his community and the state. The son of John and Elizabeth Wooding Williams, pioneer Baptists, he had considerable influence in the local church and in the various Baptist bodies, which he consistently supported.⁴⁷ By the grace of God a difficult and tragic era was left behind. With confidence, Oak Ridge Baptists faced the future, because they had passed through the valley of the shadow with the rod and staff of His comfort.

⁴⁷ Louisiana Baptist Convention, *Annual* 1875.

CHAPTER VIII

MARCHING TO ZION

*Thus far into the bowels of the land
Have we march'd on without impediment.*
—Shakespeare

*Come, we that love the Lord,
And let our joys be known. . . .
We're marching to Zion. . . .
The beautiful city of God.*
—Isaac Watts

COMFORTED in their adversities and sustained by an unfailing dependence upon God, Baptists at Oak Ridge faced the post-Reconstruction era with a determination only to look forward. The country made remarkable progress in its courageous fight for recovery. Monroe, the area's leading trade center, experienced a growth in population of better than 57 per cent between 1880 and 1890. In the following decade its growth was better than 66 per cent, although in 1900 the population numbered only 5,428. Growth at Bastrop was less spectacular, as in 1900 it had a population of but 787.

Progress to 1905

Following the Civil War, a considerable number of new families moved into the community. For a time the community flourished, but many of these new settlers moved away, and the population tended to stabilize. Periods of recurrent economic depression, removals from the community, and deaths were reflected in the state of the church during the era. There were times of revival and growth, but the total membership of the church remained fairly stable

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and scarcely surpassed the highest mark set in the 1870's. 1892, for example, was a good year. Pastor E. Millar welcomed twenty-two persons for baptism and five who united with the church by letter. The church continued half-time, with preaching services on the first and third Sundays, and during most of the 1890's paid the pastor a salary of \$350 per year. Financial conditions forced a decrease in the salary during the latter part of the 1890's, but the amount was raised to \$400 by 1905.

The stability of the church resulted largely from the efforts of the older families, whose members remained in the community and dedicated themselves sacrificially to the work of the church. Typical of such dedication was the Barham family. William Thomas Barham, son of Thomas Nathanael and Sallie Barham, was born September 13, 1846, at Macon, Mississippi. He was brought to Oak Ridge in early childhood. On March 1, 1876, he married Ada G. Mott, who was born on January 19, 1848, in Rapides Parish and was the widow of George W. Mott. They were married in New Orleans at Coliseum Place Baptist Church, the marriage being solemnized by the celebrated pastor of that church, Norvel W. Wilson, and witnessed by L. E. Conger, W. A. Moore, and J. D. Carr.¹ Dr. Wilson, known as one of the most "eloquent ministers of the South," died in 1878, a victim of yellow fever.²

Among the pastors of Oak Ridge Baptist Church in the 1880's was T. N. Rhymes. A graduate of Mississippi College and Southern Seminary, he was married to Bettie Toler, daughter of Judge P. H. Toler, of Rayville. Rhymes practiced law for a time, eventually giving it up to return to Mississippi

¹ Family Records, Barham Family Bible.

² Paxton, *A History of the Baptists of Louisiana* (St. Louis, 1888), pp. 536-41.

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and the full-time work of the ministry. In later years he returned to Louisiana and lived at Rayville.³

Denominational Work

Oak Ridge Baptists maintained an active interest in the work of the state convention as well as Bayou Macon Association. The one person in the church most responsible for stimulating interest in denominational work from the 1880's to the turn of the century was John Flood Madison. Born in 1825 in Prince Edward County, Virginia, Madison was married in 1850 to Susan Christopher Williams, daughter of John and Elizabeth Wooding Williams. John and Susan Madison came to Oak Ridge about 1859. He served in the Confederate Army and afterward became actively identified with the church.⁴ Upon reaching maturity, James Pemberton and H. Flood Madison, sons of John Flood and Susan Williams Madison, established a law practice in Bastrop and became widely known in the legal profession. James P. Madison served as district judge.

John Flood Madison served for many years as clerk of the church, his sprawling handwriting being the oldest in the Minutes of the church now in existence. He served as moderator of Bayou Macon Association, gave liberally of his means for denominational causes, and inspired the church to support the work with increasing fervor. Thus, in 1881 the church contributed \$53.50 to state missions and in subsequent years gave proportionately to all mission causes. In 1905, in addition to the various mission offerings, the church contributed \$83.00 to the newly established state Baptist orphanage.

In 1891 the pastor at Oak Ridge, O. P. Miles, edited a twelve-page monthly missionary paper, the *Bayou Macon*

³ Foster, *Mississippi Baptist Preachers* (St. Louis, 1895), pp. 573-74.

⁴ Family Records, Lessie Madison Garrett.

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Missionary. This publication stimulated interest in the missionary enterprise. Concern was felt especially for the territory served by the association, within which territory, as late as 1892, it was reported that many had not heard a sermon and did not own a Bible. Concern was felt for foreign missions as well. At the meeting of the association in 1894, several persons from Oak Ridge "gave their names and promised to work" for foreign missions, including J. F. and Susan Madison and G. A. Dillard. A deacon at Oak Ridge, Dillard presented the report on publications, in which he urged the reading of the home and foreign missions journals.⁵

The missionary zeal of the church bore fruit in the 1890's, when J. L. McAdams entered the ministry. A member of the Oak Ridge Church, he enrolled at Keatchie College to prepare for his chosen work. The church and the association gave him every assistance, the association in 1893 taking an offering for his support.⁶ He later served as pastor of a number of churches in the association.

Contributions to Christian Education

A reflection of the community's recovery from Reconstruction and its renewed material prosperity was seen in the lifting of its cultural horizons. This cultural lift resulted especially in a new emphasis upon education. The more prominent old families in the church wisely directed attention to the need for Christian education. They were influenced to no small degree by their ministers, who were men of vision and learning. An associational missionary, R. B. Hewitt, who lived at Oak Ridge in 1892, pointed out the need of the day not only for "a broader theology" but for "trained minds to discriminate between the true and the false."⁷ In 1891

⁵ Bayou Macon Association, *Minutes* 1894, p. 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, *Minutes* 1893, p. 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, *Minutes* 1892, pp. 6-8.

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W. D. Whetstone helped to draft a report which called attention to Christian education as a matter "second to none in importance" and which urged support for the Baptist colleges of the state.⁸ During these years, no denominational offerings taken at Oak Ridge received more enthusiastic response than the offerings for Christian education.

Baptist families at Oak Ridge probably sent more children to college than any comparable group of Baptists anywhere; they established a trend which has persisted to the present day. One reason for the stability of the church, the strength of its family life, and the loyalty of its sons and daughters was found in the proportionately large number of its youth who attended Baptist colleges. Favorite Baptist colleges in the earlier years were Mississippi College and Georgetown College (located at Georgetown, Kentucky). Later, Mt. Lebanon and Louisiana College attracted a great number of students from Oak Ridge.

Louisiana Baptists recognized the strong support of Oak Ridge Baptists in the field of Christian education. The state convention therefore called upon able men in the Oak Ridge church to serve on the boards of various educational institutions in the state. Oak Ridge responded as readily with its administrative skills as it had with its financial support and with its youth.

At the turn of the century, when the state convention assumed control of both Mt. Lebanon and Keatchie College, Mt. Lebanon was called Mt. Lebanon Baptist Male College and Keatchie became known as Louisiana Baptist Female College. In 1903 the state convention elected Dr. Walter A. Russell, of Oak Ridge, to membership on the Board of Trustees of the college at Keatchie.⁹ Dr. Russell, a physician, was a product of Mississippi College and the Medical School

⁸ *Ibid.*, *Minutes* 1891, pp. 7-8.

⁹ Louisiana Baptist Convention, *Annual* 1903.

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of Tulane University. A native of Newton County, Mississippi, he came to Oak Ridge and affiliated with Oak Ridge Baptist Church in 1891. Dr. Russell was possessed of a keen intellect and maintained an active interest in the church for many years. A bachelor, he boarded at the W. T. Barham home for a lengthy period. He rode horseback to minister to the sick throughout the surrounding country. In later years ill health forced his retirement from practice, and he became inactive. He died in 1955 at the age of eighty-seven and was buried in the Baptist Cemetery.

Another devoted champion of Christian education was the venerable John Flood Madison, who was elected a member of the Board of Trustees of Mt. Lebanon Baptist Male College in 1902. Continuing in this position, he was among those selected by the state convention in 1904 to secure a permanent location and necessary buildings for a new Baptist college, a movement which resulted in the establishment of Louisiana College.¹⁰ Madison was thus one of the founders of Louisiana College.¹¹ A son, H. Flood Madison, reared under the influence of Oak Ridge Baptist Church and a product of Mississippi College, also rendered able service to the denomination in the cause of Christian education.

Public Service

Baptist emphasis upon education with a Christian orientation made no small impact upon the total life of the community, for it contributed immeasurably to the shaping of character, a necessary qualification for worthy public service. That Baptists of Oak Ridge possessed this qualification was eloquently attested by the community in its election of eminent Baptists to serve—as they did with honor

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Annual 1904, p. 31.

¹¹ Lela Beall Costello, "Louisiana College," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, II, 808-9.

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and credit—in positions of trust on local, parish, and state levels. These Baptists considered their vocations sacred trusts; their daily work afforded opportunities for witnessing.

Typical of the moral insight with which they faced public issues, Baptists spontaneously and unanimously joined the fight against the Louisiana Lottery, an issue which came to white heat in the early 1890's. Characteristically, J. F. Madison led Bayou Macon Association in its attack upon the Lottery. At the meeting of the association in Monroe in 1891, Madison denounced the Lottery in the bitterest terms, his position winning immediate and unequivocal endorsement from the association.¹²

At the turn of the century, Morehouse Parish was represented in the Louisiana Legislature by W. D. Whetstone. A man of considerable influence, Whetstone also served for a period on the police jury of the parish. He died in 1923, having been a member of Oak Ridge Baptist Church for almost sixty years. Often present at denominational meetings outside the local church, he assumed civic responsibilities as a part of his Christian duty, witnessing to the faith of his church in his loyalty as a public servant.

On November 22, 1899, Sue E. Norris (Mrs. William Jesse Norris) was appointed postmaster at Oak Ridge, a position which she filled until 1914. She again acted briefly in this capacity from the fall of 1925 until the spring of 1926. The former Susan Emma Carr, she was born in 1857 and died in 1939. Known popularly as "Miss Sue," she was long identified with Oak Ridge Baptists in every worthy cause. She managed the affairs of the post office with extraordinary efficiency and endeared herself to the community by the warmth of her Christian personality. Her descendants are

¹² Bayou Macon, *Minutes* 1891, p 3.

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represented in the church today, including Joe Wayne Johnston, a youth whose consecration has commended him to the church family.

A progressive step was taken when Oak Ridge was incorporated on September 13, 1904. Business and agricultural leaders formed the backbone of the community. These men were endowed with vision; their attachment to the community led them to unflagging zeal for its betterment. The first mayor was Thomas O. Files, long a member of the local Baptist congregation. Two of the councilmen were esteemed Baptist leaders, W. T. Barham and J. W. Flynn. Thus, the Baptists were in the front ranks of the leaders who sought to chart for the community a course of integrity as well as prosperity.

Christian Family Life

Baptist homes and the church shared in producing Christian leaders who performed enduring public service. The church in no small way inspired a quality of home life from which such leaders could arise.

Family life was comparatively simple during the period from the 1880's to the turn of the century. The home provided a common focus for community life. Often the scene of much merriment and festivity, it also still wielded extraordinary leverage through the somewhat patriarchal role of the head of the household. The planters supplied their tenants with commodities until the fall harvest, a season when the merchants did a booming business if the crops were good. Merchants provided credit to the planters, who in turn assumed responsibility for their tenants.

The ledger books of Barham and Company, one of the prominent mercantile establishments, almost detailed an eyewitness account of the common life, for the owner of the firm, W. T. Barham, meticulously jotted down each item

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purchased, including the transactions of his own household. In 1890 J. F. Madison was charged \$1.00 for ten pounds of sugar and \$2.50 for ten pounds of coffee. Mrs. M. E. Dix paid \$6.50 for a barrel of flour, while A. W. Bridgers paid \$.60 for eight yards of calico. Thomas O. Files wore a pair of cuff links for which he paid \$.25. A pair of spectacles cost G. A. Dillard \$.50.¹³

Judging by the frequency and amounts of the purchases, snuff and tobacco were among the most necessary household items, although lamps and kerosene, invariably called "coal oil," were also popular. Coal oil, sold for \$.25 a gallon, was used chiefly for lighting.

Along with turpentine and the always reliable quinine, coal oil also had medicinal uses. An important element in every household was an adequate supply of medicines. Household remedies included a vast array of patent medicines. The most popular of these was a preparation called "antiseptic," a reputed cure for most common ailments. One of the best sellers was a "chill cure," a necessity in every home. Laudanum and morphine were bought with as much ease as molasses and corn meal. Morphine sold for \$.30 a bottle.

On July 22, 1890, the Barham family account was charged with \$2.00 for an alpaca coat for Eugene, son of W. T. and Ada Barham.¹⁴ John, another son, needed a pair of shoes on April 2, 1898, while just a month later Mack also required a pair. Cash outlays that year for the seven sons in the family included \$2.80 paid to Erle on May 7 and \$.10 handed to Mack on May 20.¹⁵ Ben Edwards, called "Mack," upon reaching maturity was graduated from the Medical School of Tulane University. He settled with his brothers at Oak

¹³ Barham & Co., *Ledger Book*, 1890.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, *Ledger Book*, 1898, pp. 19-21.

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Ridge, where as a member of Oak Ridge Baptist Church, a Mason, and a practicing physician he endeared himself to the community by the depth of his understanding and the warmth of his compassion for his fellow men.

Significantly, heads of families represented in the church often grounded their Christian social concern in the sanctity of the home and a compulsion to preserve its idealism and moral force. John Flood Madison's reports to the association, sparkling with originality, revealed such motivation. He wrote in 1891:

... There is perhaps no greater influence in our homes than the literature which is brought to our firesides. These silent monitors which have no rebuttal of evidence and whose views are clothed too often in beautiful language and conclusions foreign to religion, perhaps shape the future views of our children, and too often their views as to religion. . . .¹⁶

Madison described intemperance as "this hydra-headed monster," spoke of its history as being "written in the starvation of orphans, in the misery of the family circles," and attributed to it "the crushed and bleeding hearts of women," as well as "the sighs of mothers and the blasted hopes of gray-headed fathers." He declared that a "decrease of crime and poverty" followed the enactment of prohibiting statutes.¹⁷ In 1898 he wrote on the same subject:

... But volumes by the thousands and words as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore would fail to depict the misery it entails on the family circle. The silent sufferer is the mother or the wife who clings to the wretched inebriate in all of his degradation, knowing that all others have ignored and forsaken him. . . .¹⁸

The fine quality of leadership afforded the community de-

¹⁶ Bayou Macon, *Minutes* 1891.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *Minutes* 1894, p. 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, *Minutes* 1898.



William Thomas Barham and Ada G. Mott Barham.

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rived from a rare dedication to the Christian home, which was predicated chiefly upon family loyalty, mutual confidence, and deep respect for the church and its principles. Such a home Deacon William Thomas Barham and his wife, Ada, provided for their seven sons, one unsurpassed for its stately living, its warm hospitality, and its sincere devotion to the Christian precepts to which the church gave witness. There, the ministers found an unfailing welcome, the teachers and traveling salesmen a festive board. There, Ada Barham presided over her household with the efficiency of an able administrator, the poise and quiet dignity of a queen ruling her domain.

In his letters to his sons, W. T. Barham displayed the qualities of character that won for him the esteem of both the church and the people among whom he lived. On June 15, 1897, Barham wrote to his son Thomas Eugene, who had just completed his work at Georgetown College, a Baptist institution in Kentucky, and was taking a commercial course at Poughkeepsie, New York. After stating that it "takes a life to build a good character" and that one cannot be independent of his fellows—"life is a failure without their good will"—he continued:

It is essential that you accord to every man his own; do not try to mount by trampling others under foot. Be kind, considerate and sincere in dealing with them, and they in turn will be kind to you. Never repay evil with evil; be just, do right, and you will reap your reward. Leave vengeance with God. 'I will repay,' saith He. Have good manners, not put on like a suit of clothes, but let it radiate from the soul like pleasing incense. . . .¹⁹

Barham urged against confounding success with greatness, advising his son to "make the most of the gift from heaven"

¹⁹ Letters from W. T. Barham to Thomas Eugene Barham, from a collection entitled *Letters from a Father to His Sons*. (8 pp.) Privately printed.

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and warning that disappointments would "come like a heart-break and temptation invite you to something easier, to lower your aims, to give up." He stated:

God gives one man a talent, to another He gives two, and so on to ten talents. He does not expect any of them to be buried, but to be used and accounted for to Him.²⁰

After pointing out the banefulness of repeating "all one hears to another's discredit," Barham concluded:

The men who stand in the front in the world today are those who keep their word as sacred as a woman's honor.

The surest way to win men's confidence is to deserve it. True success after all is simply doing one's duty. Do that well and leave to God the rest.

For which I shall forever pray.²¹

On October 20, 1902, W. T. Barham wrote to another son, Robert Erle, who had also finished his course at Georgetown and was engaged in commercial studies at Poughkeepsie. Barham enclosed a copy of the letter he had previously written to Eugene. He referred to it as follows:

... The sentiments expressed therein apply to all my sons alike. . . . As every thought was pulsed from the heart, I trust you will ponder and preserve it and let it influence your actions throughout your life. I will ask no better monument to my memory than these principles implanted in my boys' hearts.²²

Church Life

Strong family ties rooted deeply in Christian faith added to the stability of the church. Members of families represented in the church before the turn of the century, in addition to names previously mentioned, included the Burnett, Boozman, Blakemore, Conger, Clark, Colvin, Caruthers,

²⁰ *Loc. cit.*

²¹ *Loc. cit.*

²² W. T. Barham, *op. cit.*, Letter to Robert Erle Barham.

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and Chunn families; such names as Dorsey and Durling, Miss Kate Fitch, Miss Netta Files, and Sallie Tucker Gardner; the W. S. Hathcox family, the Heaths, and Miss Lida Hewitt; the Kennedy, McAdams, and Marable families, Miss Lizzie Moore, and S. A. McGowen; the Panquins, William H. Smith (1851-1919)—baptized in 1875—Susan Smith McDuffie, the Summerlins, and the Striplings.

Many of these individuals made useful, lasting, and sacrificial contributions as the church progressed, although existing records leave much to be desired in any attempt to piece together an adequate picture of their heroic efforts. Associational records indicate that before 1900 William H. Smith, Milton King Larkin, Fred M. Tucker, and A. B. Conger represented the church at various times in the associational meetings. Robert Larkin was also active in the church. A. B. Conger and his wife, Estelle Cooper Conger, were baptized in 1891. Conger was elected church clerk in 1902, after the failing health of J. F. Madison forced him to resign this position. In the early 1900's Conger also began a long tenure as Sunday school superintendent.

The Sunday school had continued an uninterrupted growth from its organization in 1871. An enrollment of fifty was reported in 1891, while in 1894 Superintendent W. A. Gill reported an organization of seven officers and teachers with a total enrollment of one hundred. In 1896 J. F. Madison reported that Oak Ridge Baptists had "a flourishing Sunday school, never closing for seasons."²³ Average attendance in the Sunday school, however, hardly exceeded forty. Some of the superintendents of the Sunday school between the 1880's and early 1900's included T. W. Williams, W. A. Gill, J. F. Madison, F. M. Tucker, J. William Davis, and A. B. Conger.

²³ Bayou Macon, *Minutes* 1896.

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Missionary enthusiasm and a desire to promote more energetically the work of the church gave rise to a distinctive organization for the women. Early in the 1890's E. Millar, pastor at Oak Ridge, recommended that the pastors of the association "encourage the women in their work of advancing God's cause" and urged the churches to promote the organization of missionary societies among the women.²⁴ In 1896 the pastor at Oak Ridge, J. E. Robinson, noted the progress made and renewed the plea for more missionary societies. The pastors at Oak Ridge found strong allies among the better-informed men of the congregation, for such leaders as J. F. Madison gave moral support to the new venture.

Encouraged by their pastors and the men of the church, Oak Ridge Baptist women in the 1890's organized their first missionary society. Maggie (Mrs. Robert) Blakemore worked untiringly on behalf of this organization, which for some years was called simply the "Ladies' Aid." Much work of a benevolent nature was done in the local community in addition to the missionary efforts expended in support of the denominational program. When Miss Maude Baker, a graduate of Mt. Lebanon, returned to Oak Ridge and affiliated with the church in 1903, she immediately inspired fresh enthusiasm among the women. She was instrumental in reorganizing the Ladies' Aid for more efficient operation. In keeping with the trend of the times, it was then called the Woman's Missionary Society. This organization immensely enhanced the effectiveness of the church.

Meaningful worship services helped to maintain a vital spiritual tone in the life of the church. An old organ, pumped laboriously by Mrs. Robert Blakemore or Miss Maude Baker, added solemn notes as the devout congregation joined in singing its thanksgiving to God, affirmations of faith, and

²⁴ *Ibid.*, *Minutes* 1892, p. 12.

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expressions of confidence in the security offered by the Saviour through the grace of God. If the ministers became too involved with their messages and preached at great length (as sometimes happened), or if they suffered unduly from the summer heat before the day of the electric fan, they slaked their thirst from a pitcher of water placed handily nearby. For such occasions, A. W. Bridgers gave the church a handsome silver water pitcher and cup appropriately engraved. They are still in the possession of the church. In 1901 J. William Davis presented to the church a beautiful Pulpit Bible, which also has been preserved.

Administering the ordinances in the old days called for special effort; the occasions when they were administered attracted special attention as well. The deacons made elaborate preparations for these important services. In the observance of the Lord's Supper, the deacons served the wine to the congregation from two exquisite silver chalices—the use of individual cups, a modern innovation, had not become popular—the believers on either side of the building drinking from the same cup. These treasured antiques have been preserved by the church.

A makeshift baptistry was installed in the old church at one time, although it apparently never proved very efficient. Usually, the "old baptizing hole" on Lake Lafourche was used for the administration of beautiful believer's baptism, the ancient symbol of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Contrary to a common misinterpretation, Baptists have never taught that baptism is necessary for the salvation of an individual. Baptism depicts the believer's death to a life apart from Christ and his resurrection to a new life with Christ. Immersion has been insisted upon because that mode of baptism best fits the symbolism intended, is scriptural, and is the oldest form of baptism known in church history.

Much time in the church business meetings was devoted

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to the matter of raising funds for the pastor's salary. In addition to the matter of calling a pastor, on the "third Sabbath in May, 1901," Church Clerk J. F. Madison reported that the congregation authorized a committee "to solicit subscriptions for the payment of pastor's salary." The committee consisted of the following representatives from various areas of the community: W. T. Barham and A. B. Conger for Oak Ridge; W. S. Hathcox for his vicinity; and J. F. Madison for Gum Ridge.²⁵

Because the churches of the community had the services of their ministers only on a part-time basis, there was much visiting back and forth among the various congregations when worship services were held. Consequently, leading citizens of all denominations felt concerned about the payment of the salaries of the various ministers. Thus on April 12, 1898, W. T. Barham made the following entry, debited to his personal account, in his Ledger Book: "Cash, \$10, Rev. Barr."²⁶ Ministering to local Methodists for several years and ultimately making Oak Ridge his permanent home, D. C. Barr was a highly respected Methodist minister, deeply beloved by members of all churches alike. Members of other churches likewise helped with the salary of the Baptist minister. In 1905, for example, a part of the subscription list for the Baptist minister's salary read as follows: "J. S. Rolfe, \$25; A. P. Wimberly, \$25; F. W. Files, \$5; W. W. Whithorne, \$2.50."²⁷

Erecting a New Edifice

At the turn of the century members of the church saw that a new building would soon become a necessity. Apart from the feeling of many that the church building in the

²⁵ Oak Ridge Baptist Church, Minute Book I, Minutes of May, 1901.

²⁶ Barham & Co., Ledger Book, 1898, p. 20.

²⁷ Oak Ridge Church, *op. cit.*, Subscription List, 1905.



Top: John Flood Madison and Susan Williams Madison.



Bottom: Maude Baker Darby shown standing in front of the old church building located in the cemetery.

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cemetery was inconveniently located, the old building was inadequate and had become somewhat dilapidated as a result of the ravages of time. The decision to abandon the old building was a heart-rending one, for around it clustered a host of sacred memories. There, on January 3, 1889, the funeral of John M. Huffman had been conducted.²⁸ Colonel Huffman, long-time President of the Baptist Cemetery Trustees, was a widely known and highly respected civic leader; his funeral drew a large gathering of relatives and friends from throughout the parish. The church yet grieved over the death of Deacon T. W. Williams in 1891 and the death of Deacon G. A. Dillard in 1895. Adding to its sorrow, Deacon A. W. Bridgers died in 1900.

The congregation had sustained serious losses. A number of the older leaders could no longer consistently furnish their wise counsel because of the infirmities of age. John Flood Madison passed to his reward in 1908, and his beloved companion followed in 1912, both full of years and rich in the spiritual heritage which they bequeathed to the church. But a new generation had arisen, one which matched the old in vision and courage.

The old building, to which so much sentiment was attached, was found in a setting of natural beauty among a variety of imposing trees and was said to have been a structure of unusual attractiveness. Its portico entrance, having a dirt floor, was supported by plantation-style columns. Two front doors afforded entry to the building. Several of the old hand-made pews have been retained by the church. Reported to have had a seating capacity of 200, the old building was valued at \$2,500 in 1891 and at \$1,000 in 1900.

After reaching a decision to erect a new building, the church bought the lot on which the present building stands.

²⁸ Brookville Lodge No. 161, F. & A. M. (Oak Ridge), Minute Book I, p. 364.

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It was secured on June 27, 1904, from Mrs. N. E. Daily at a price of \$225.²⁹ Among the leaders making plans for the new building were W. T. Barham, A. B. Conger, and Miss Maude Baker. A wise committee, they secured the services of a Monroe architectural firm, Drago and Smith, to draw plans for the new structure.

Members of the church contributed sacrificially as they sought to achieve their goal. The Woman's Missionary Society worked untiringly, inspired by the energy of Miss Maude Baker, a woman of extraordinary artistic talents, who gave of her strength unselfishly. She was married to Dr. J. W. Darby, also a member of the church. The community was grieved at the premature death of Maude Baker Darby in 1913.

Although not a Baptist, Joseph Block West, of New Orleans, gave liberally when the financial drive was made for the construction of the new building. He had extensive business interests at Oak Ridge and was in sympathy with the work of the church. Born at Lexington, Mississippi, on October 14, 1853, West died on September 30, 1906, at Toronto, Canada. He was married to Margaret Elizabeth Dale, who was born on July 28, 1855, at Abbeville, South Carolina, and died at New Orleans on December 26, 1928. Their daughter Dorothy married Dr. Ben Edwards Barham. A member of Oak Ridge Baptist Church, she lives at Oak Ridge.

Much rejoicing attended the completion of the new edifice in 1905. Described in newspaper accounts of the day as "one of the handsomest structures in Louisiana," the church home of Oak Ridge Baptists has sheltered and inspired the members of the church in their march onward for Christ.

²⁹ Morehouse Parish, Conveyance Records, Book 28, p. 129.

CHAPTER IX

BRINGING IN THE SHEAVES

... We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

—Knowles Shaw

*There remaineth a rest for the people of God:
And I have had troubles enough, for one.*

—Robert Browning

THE construction of a new edifice in a more central location had the effect of stimulating the church to new growth. A rapid growth of the more populous centers of the region reflected the industrialization of the area between 1905 and 1935. While the population of Monroe was only slightly more than 10,000 in 1910, it exceeded 26,000 in 1930. Bastrop had a population of 854 in 1910, but in 1930 this figure had risen to 5,121. With only slight modifications, the agricultural community at Oak Ridge remained fairly stable in its population, which always contained a preponderance of Negroes. Oak Ridge had a population of 318 in 1920, and in 1930 the figure stood at 260. The Fifth Ward, from which the church has always drawn support, had a population of 3,088 in 1930.

Revival and Growth

One reason for the growth of the church was the able leadership of the men, especially the deacons. On Sunday morning, April 29, 1906, an ordination service was conducted for two deacons-elect, John William Flynn (1872-1930) and Thomas Hill Williams. The pastor of the church at that time, S. D. Almand, was assisted in the ordination service by a visiting evangelist, William Cooksey, and W. T. Barham,

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who had a long record of service as a deacon.¹ Flynn and his wife, Della Bledsoe Flynn (1874-1930), maintained a devout Christian home and reared a lovely family. Their son, Homer Flynn, is a member of the church at Oak Ridge today and serves as one of the cemetery trustees. A faithful deacon, J. W. Flynn also served a number of years as church treasurer, as a member of the finance committee, and in various capacities in the denominational work.

Thomas Hill Williams (1858-1925) was the son of a beloved deacon, Thomas Wooding Williams. He rendered notable service as a deacon and on important committees, always encouraged by his faithful companion, Beulah Baker Williams, who also worked actively as a Sunday school teacher.

The church probably never had a more energetic, tireless servant than A. B. Conger. Clerk of the church for some twenty years, he reported a membership of 117 in 1911, and a membership of 120 in 1913. Among other comments in the Minutes of the church, "Mr. Bun" made an entry on February 8, 1923, recording that a heavy sleet, four inches deep, fell on February 4 and "is not all melted."²

Men of spotless reputation and sterling character enhanced the esteem in which the church was held. Such a man was W. T. Barham, who served as state senator during the period of World War I. He led in the organization of the local bank and served as its president until his death in 1919. Barham rendered invaluable service to the church in his work on pulpit and finance committees, positions which called for wisdom, integrity, and vision. Through his insight the church found wise and consecrated pastors, men who combined evangelistic zeal with learning and administrative skill.

¹ Oak Ridge Baptist Church, Minute Book I, Minutes, April 29, 1906.
² *Ibid.*, February 8, 1923.

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Such a pastor was J. W. Tinnin, whose tenure embraced the years 1914-1919. A Mississippian, who had shown great promise as a Methodist minister, Tinnin became a Baptist through the urging of his conscience. A man of considerable eloquence, completely dedicated, he and his family formed unbreakable ties with the entire community. The church experienced a remarkable revival, receiving twenty-two for baptism and reporting a membership of 160 in 1916. Tinnin worked tirelessly throughout the association, serving as a missionary preacher and leading in the organization of new churches. A number of the Tinnin sons and grandsons became Baptist ministers. Oak Ridge has proudly claimed (at least partially) the eminent Dr. Finley W. Tinnin, who edited the *Baptist Message* for thirty-seven years.

Another factor which contributed to the growth of the church in the early decades of the present century was the respect commanded by the integrity with which it conducted its business affairs. No little credit is due the men responsible. For example, on July 10, 1904, A. B. Conger and Robert Erle Barham were elected trustees of the church.³ Closely connected with its business affairs, they gave unselfishly of their time and energies in activities which fostered its growth. Baptized in 1894, R. E. Barham is yet active, having given sixty-six years to the church. He is president of the local bank and serves as a church trustee. His children are active in the church and his grandchildren are enrolled in the Sunday school.

Another outstanding business leader of the community, Joseph W. Brodnax, gave more than half a century of his life and service to the church. Brodnax served on the Police Jury of the parish for many years. He succeeded W. T. Barham as president of the local bank, a position which he held

³ *Ibid.*, July 10, 1904.

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until his death in 1946. Brodnax faithfully attended the services of the church, participated in its business meetings, often served on finance and pulpit committees, and represented the church at denominational gatherings away from home.

Another important reason for the church's growth was found in the strong solidarity and loyalty of its families. Faithful in support of the church, W. S. Hathcox (1838-1914) and his wife, Martha Virginia Hathcox (1856-1932), nurtured a love for the church in their son, Robert C. Hathcox. The sole member of his family yet in the community, R. C. Hathcox served as clerk of the church for some fifteen years, and is one of the cemetery trustees. Likewise, the William H. Smith family added strength to the church. At the turn of the century Smith (1851-1919), whose wife had died, was married to a widow, Minnie Belle White Young (1876-1956). Their sons, James Curtis (called "Sam") and Ernest Belton Smith, are yet members of the church. J. C. Smith serves as one of the cemetery trustees.

A continued emphasis upon Christian education in the opening decades of the present century infused vitality into the organizational structure of the church. Thomas N. Barham, son of W. T. and Ada Barham, and Robert C. Hathcox attended Mt. Lebanon, a Baptist institution. The sons of the A. B. Congers, A. B. Conger, Jr., and W. Edwin Conger, attended Louisiana College. A little later—from 1916 to 1920—William M. Nolan attended Mississippi College. All of these men returned to Oak Ridge better prepared to render efficient service to the church because of a Christian education. With the exception of T. N. Barham, who died some years ago, they are members of the church today.

Denominational Work

Oak Ridge Baptists maintained a half-time ministry

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through the years of the Great Depression of the 1930's. Up to that time considerable progress had been made in the financial program of the church. The pastor was paid a salary of \$500 per year in 1913, while by 1918 the amount had been raised to \$900, the figure at which it stood in 1929. In the thirties the salary was decreased and in 1935 the pastor was paid only \$500. The membership of the church decreased also, as the population tended to dwindle somewhat during the period of economic reverses. In 1925 the church had a membership of 133, but in 1932 the membership was 115. Total contributions to the church in 1913 amounted to some \$700; in 1916, to about \$1,000; in 1923, to more than \$2,300; in 1935, to less than \$1,300.

Interest in the Baptist Seventy-five Million Campaign stimulated Oak Ridge Baptists to more generous support of missionary and benevolent causes. During the period of the campaign—1919-1924—Oak Ridge Baptists contributed a total of almost \$4,000.⁴ Much of the success of this campaign at Oak Ridge was due to the sacrificial labors of the local treasurers. For a time Mrs. J. L. Whithorne served as treasurer. She was succeeded by Dorothy West Barham, who conscientiously and successfully pursued this difficult task for a number of years, later serving the church as missions treasurer and keeping accurate records of Cooperative Program receipts and expenditures.

In 1925 Morehouse-Ouachita Baptist Association was formed from a part of Bayou Macon Association, since the latter had grown too large and covered too wide an area to serve effectively. The first meeting of the new association was at Oak Ridge on October 7, 1925. Dorothy West Barham was elected treasurer of the new association and, along with F. E. Hogan, served on its executive committee. Edna

⁴ Church Records, statement from Louisiana Baptist Headquarters, January 13, 1925.

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Reese Conger (Mrs. A. B. Conger, Jr.) was elected to represent the association as a messenger to the state convention.⁵

Attending the association and reporting on the work of the Sunday schools was Ernestine Carter Hathcox (Mrs. Robert C. Hathcox), who pointed out that almost every school in the association had developed a larger program of teacher training. She stressed the role of the stronger churches in assisting "the rural schools in perfecting their organization and encouraging them in their work for larger attendance and education."⁶ Presently the teacher of the women's Sunday school class at Oak Ridge Baptist Church, a position which she has held for many years, Ernestine C. Hathcox has contributed immeasurably to the development of the children of Oak Ridge. She is a specialist in lower elementary education, and her story gives promise of becoming a legend in the public school of the community. Often in demand as a consultant in professional circles, she also gives generously of her time to the women's work and other phases of church life.

Among the many who consistently attended the associational meetings, none from Oak Ridge enjoyed them more than genial, friendly Jessie J. Nolan (1879-1930). Coming to Oak Ridge from Union Parish at the turn of the century with his young wife, Mollie Stokes Nolan, he began farming without capital or educational advantages. Industrious and resourceful, Nolan and his wife provided a happy and comfortable home for their eleven children. Nolan played with the same vigor manifested in his work, encouraging his boys in athletics, hunting, and fishing. Devoted to the church, the Nolans led their children to participate fully in its organizational life. Nolan was once named Morehouse Parish's "Master Farmer of the Year." At his premature death,

⁵ Morehouse-Ouachita Baptist Association, *Minutes* 1925.
⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

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he left his family an excellent plantation and comfortable means; but their most treasured legacy was found in the richness of his faith, the abundance of his devotion to the church, and the correctness of his example.

The Sunday School

Between 1905 and 1916 the Sunday school enjoyed a healthy growth. From an enrollment of only forty-six in 1905, the school grew to an enrollment of five teachers and fifty-eight pupils in 1912. By 1916 there were eight teachers and an enrollment of 103. Following World War I there was some decline in the Sunday school enrollment, but the organizational efficiency of the school showed marked improvement. Between 1925 and 1935 the school maintained a staff of some ten to eleven officers and teachers. Enrollment remained steady at about seventy and the average attendance was about fifty.

At the opening of the present century, the Sunday school was looked upon by most of the men as an organization for women and children. Almost the sole exception among the Baptist men at Oak Ridge was Asberry Bernard Conger. The "Mr. Sunday School" in the Oak Ridge of his day, he served as superintendent until the mid-1920's, a period of some twenty years. Before his tenure as superintendent ended, however, he had succeeded in enlisting numerous men in the active support of this organization and had prepared a number of them for important administrative duties. He also added more talented women to the teaching force of the school.

Asberry Bernard Conger (1856-1935) was born at Oak Ridge, his father having died when he was a small boy. Through his father's influence Conger became identified with Oak Ridge Baptists. He bore the same name as his father, although one of his sons is known as A. B. Conger,

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Jr. Conger was married to Estelle Cooper (1866-1946), daughter of a pioneer Oak Ridge citizen, James C. Cooper, Jr. Both Conger and his wife served the church devotedly; they cared for the church's communion set and made necessary preparations for the observance of the Lord's Supper. They maintained a devoutly Christian home, to which they often welcomed the visiting ministers. Their children had opportunities for fellowship with their pastors in the home and were thus encouraged to continue a useful relationship with the church.

A successful planter and cattleman, Conger gave liberally of his means for the support of the church. He served in many important capacities as a leader and always felt sympathetically inclined toward every worthwhile denominational venture, often attending the denominational meetings and enjoying the fellowship of the pastors and laymen throughout the state. The church profited by the wisdom of his leadership especially in securing competent teaching help for the Sunday school. Conger set a good example for his teachers: the records indicate that in 1910 he was absent only two Sundays.⁷

In 1910 Conger worked with the following teachers in the Sunday school: Mrs. Robert Blakemore, Mrs. W. T. Barham, Mrs. M. Jeannette Files, Mrs. T. H. Williams, Miss Myrtle Bridgers, and Mrs. J. S. Norris.⁸ These faithful women gave of their talents unselfishly and made wise investments in the lives of others, many of whom today remember them with gratitude for the privilege of having learned the timeless truths under their tutelage. Maggie Blakemore left the church a small legacy at her death.⁹ Ada Barham, who died in 1938, was a member of the church for sixty-seven years

⁷ Church Records, Sunday School Record Book, 1910.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹ Church Minutes, I, September 21, 1913.



Asberry Bernard Conger and Estelle Cooper Conger.

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and actively worked in it almost to the time of her death at the age of ninety. Jeannette Files was the mother of Thomas O. Files, who served the church with distinction for so many years. As did Maggie Blakemore, Jessie Eason Norris served for several years as Sunday school secretary. The wife of John S. Norris, she died in 1952. Tireless in her efforts on behalf of the missionary society, she reared her family in the church and made a lasting contribution to its total life. Her sister, Ida Eason Reese, was also active in the church. Ida Reese's daughters, Edna R. Conger and Gladys R. Baker, continue to serve effectively in the various activities of the church. Gladys Baker's children—some of whom yet retain their membership at Oak Ridge—added strength to the various organizations as they matured under the nurture of the church.

Another extraordinary record in the Sunday school was made by Thomas Eugene Barham (1877-1958), son of William Thomas and Ada Barham. Called upon to serve in many important capacities throughout his long and useful life in the church, he rendered no more lasting service than that performed as secretary of the Sunday school, a position which he held at his death and for a total of some thirty years. A planter and businessman, he was married to Lillian Pipes. Barham served for a number of years on the parish School Board. He was appointed postmaster at Oak Ridge in 1926, continuing in that position until his retirement in 1947.

An example as a father, an inspiration as a respected citizen and community leader, Barham appealed to the intuitive love of the children in the Sunday school. Known as "Papa" to the children, he made his visits to the Sunday school classes each Sunday morning carrying a paper bag filled with chewing gum, which he passed out to his own great delight as well as that of the children.

Following the beloved A. B. Conger, Frank Earl Hogan

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became superintendent of the Sunday school. He held the position until 1948, a tenure of more than twenty years. Hogan was born in Carroll County, Missouri, in 1887. His wife, Hulda Menn Hogan, was born in Texas in 1889 and reared in New Mexico, where they were married. The Hogans came to Oak Ridge in 1913, immediately uniting with the church and identifying themselves with all phases of the work. A man of remarkable vigor, Hogan was baptized in Missouri in January, 1900, the ordinance being administered in a pond which was used for cutting ice to be stored for the summer. At the time he was baptized the ice was six inches thick on the pond. It had to be cut and pushed underneath the remaining crust in order to provide a baptismal area.

Hogan has served as a deacon at Oak Ridge for more than forty years. He has been a member of the parish Police Jury for more than fifteen years. As Sunday school superintendent, he often found it necessary to arrive early in order to kindle the fires in the days of the wood-burning heaters. He and his wife have reared a lovely family and provided a home affording gracious hospitality for all and especially for the ministers. A successful planter, Hogan has been generous with his means, particularly with respect to the church and its pastor.

The BTU

The organization now known as the Baptist Training Union was formerly called the Baptist Young People's Union. It was fostered principally among the older youth of the church in the beginning, the first records of such an organization at Oak Ridge dating back only to 1921. In that year the church had a Senior BYPU with seventeen members. The

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president of the organization was J. S. Norris, Jr.; Rebecca Flynn served as secretary.¹⁰

In 1923 the BYPU had an enrollment of eleven, with five of them having taken a study course. By 1929 the seniors had enrolled eighteen; Jack Nolan served as president. Of the twenty enrolled in the union in 1932, fifteen took a study course. The church maintained a steady interest in this promising group, electing Edna Reese Conger leader of the organization in 1933.¹¹

By 1934 the Baptist Training Union was fully organized, having during that year two unions—seniors and juniors—with five general officers, an enrollment of thirty-four, and an average attendance of twenty-one. The two study courses attracted twenty-seven participants. In the fall of that year the following officers were elected to serve during 1935: Lamar Walker, director, with Ernestine C. Hathcox as associate; secretary, Ada Mott; Jack Nolan, chorister, with Mildred Bardin as pianist; Hulda M. Hogan, junior leader, with Blanche Lewis Norman and Dorothy West Barham as sponsors.¹²

Many of the youths who found inspiration in the work of the BTU made use of the training acquired in that organization as they grew to maturity and accepted places of leadership in the church. Much credit must be given the wise leaders of the organizations, for they worked tirelessly, often under severe handicaps.

Paul Peter Norman (1875-1954), head of a family that came to church in spite of very trying conditions, lived five miles from the church and for years had to cross a bridgeless stream which was sometimes swollen by floods. Born in Illinois, Norman was married in 1911 to Blanche Lewis

¹⁰ Bayou Macon Association, *Minutes* 1921.

¹¹ Church Minutes, I, February 19, 1933.

¹² *Ibid.*, September 16, 1934.

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(1887-). Shortly after their marriage in California, they came to Oak Ridge and settled on a large plantation. Fully identifying themselves with the church and its organizations, they maintained an admirable Christian home for their several children, all of whom united with the church. The Norman home often served as an attractive gathering place for the youth of the community, and its hospitality reached out with equal affection for the minister and his family. Norman served for an extended period as an active deacon. Blanche Lewis Norman energetically promoted the BTU and worked with great zeal in the other organizations of the church. Along with the Hogans, the Normans set an example of faithful service for the youth whom they taught. For many years these two families made the necessary preparations for the church's observance of the Lord's Supper.

The WMU

When the Associational Woman's Missionary Union met at Winnsboro in 1913, Miss Edna Reese represented the Oak Ridge society. On behalf of her group, she invited the meeting to Oak Ridge for the next year.¹³ This meeting marked the beginning of a progressive new era for the women's work at Oak Ridge. The relationship with associational and district organizations created an incentive for enlargement and growth. "Miss Edna" later became the wife of A. B. Conger, Jr. Now, forty-seven years after the associational meeting at Winnsboro, she is still active in the missionary society, serving as the current president of the local organization. She has not confined her church work to one organization, however, but is a member of the cemetery trustees and has served in the Sunday school, as church treasurer, leader of the youth organizations, and in the choir. Regular in prayer

¹³ Bayou Macon Association, *Minutes* 1913.

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meeting attendance, she also usually represents the church at the association.

New horizons opened up as the women expanded their work. In 1914 their total contributions amount to \$240, while the Sunbeams, a missionary organization for the children, contributed \$12.00 in 1915. In that year Miss May Gardner reported to the association on the Judson Centennial, urging prayer for the foreign missionaries that they might "commend the religion of Jesus Christ." She encouraged wider use of diversified programs as a means of making the associational meetings more interesting.¹⁴ Inspired by their pastor's wife, Mrs. J. W. Tinnin, Oak Ridge was one of three societies in the association to reach the Honor Roll in 1916.¹⁵

In the early 1920's Lillian Pipes Barham (Mrs. T. E. Barham) served as president of the WMS. Contributions of the Oak Ridge group soared from \$427 in 1921 to \$870 in 1923. Both Sunbeams and Girls' Auxiliary, a missionary organization for girls, flourished under the fostering care of the women. A woman of boundless energy, Lillian Barham lavished attention upon her several children and yet devoted considerable time to the church. She led the women to engage in numerous charitable activities, distributing boxes of food and clothing to the needy and ministering benevolently to the sick and distressed. In a day when hospitals were rare, she served in the capacity of nurse to the entire community without discrimination. Still active and past eighty years of age, she has continued her interest in the church.

Another who served with unexcelled consistency and deep loyalty was Purity Woodard Mott (1872-1957), who was graduated from the State Normal College at Natchitoches in 1892, coming to Oak Ridge that fall as a teacher in the pub-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, *Minutes* 1915, pp. 11, 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, *Minutes* 1916.

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lic school. Married to George Emmett Mott, she became the mother of eight children. Elected to various offices in the WMS, and serving with particular distinction as secretary, she also served for a time as secretary of the Sunday school and for many years as a teacher in that organization. She often represented the church at associational meetings. The Motts gave consistently generous financial support to the church and often opened their home as the headquarters of visiting evangelists.

In the latter part of the 1920's Mrs. John McClernon served a lengthy tenure as president of the WMS. A member of the Tucker family, long prominent in the church, she devoted much time to the strengthening of the women's organization and saw the membership climb from fifteen in 1925 to twenty-one in 1929. Total contributions in 1929 amounted to \$535. In 1925 there were eleven Sunbeams and seven GA's. Cooperation with the associational organization continued. Dorothy West Barham, a member of the local society, served as Personal Service Chairman of the first WMU organization in the newly organized Morehouse-Ouachita Association in 1925.¹⁶

By 1932 the WMU at Oak Ridge boasted a full roster of organizations. Hulda M. Hogan served as president of the WMS, which had eighteen members. The GA's and Sunbeams each had ten members. The newly organized Royal Ambassadors, a missionary organization for boys, had a membership of twelve. The good work continued subsequently under the able leadership of Blanche Lewis Norman. In the missionary organizations no leader served more valiantly than Hope Conger Files, daughter of the A. B. Congers and wife of Jack M. Files. For many years she labored with the Sunbeams. At her untimely death in 1934, she

¹⁶ Morehouse-Ouachita Association, *Minutes* 1925.

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left a small son, Jack Bernard Files. An attorney, he is presently on a tour of duty with the armed forces but maintains his membership with Oak Ridge Baptists.

The story of the WMS could scarcely be told without mention of the varied talents of Clara Harkness White, whose early death in 1935 saddened the entire membership of the church. Married to Sidney White, she served for a time as secretary of the Sunday school and in numerous positions in the women's work. A woman of strong character and deep faith, she made a lasting impression upon the individuals whose lives she touched in the service of Christ.

The WMS assumed an important responsibility while the church had only half-time services—making arrangements for the entertainment of the minister on the Sundays when he visited Oak Ridge. Many of the women for various reasons found it inconvenient to have the minister in their homes for meals on certain occasions. They therefore devised a systematic plan which simplified and made more agreeable this necessary responsibility. In the records of the WMS for 1932, the "Entertainment List For Pastor" indicated that the following families cared for the minister during the year: J. J. Nolan, P. P. Norman, T. E. Barham, Dr. B. E. Barham, Bernard Conger, A. B. Carroll, Jack Files, F. E. Hogan, John McClermon, and G. E. Mott.¹⁷

In the late thirties Lola Brimberry Carroll (Mrs. Arthur B. Carroll) served for some time as president of the WMS. The organization participated extensively in the associational work, Lola Carroll acting as corresponding secretary of the Associational WMU. She also served for a considerable time as secretary of the local missionary society. Always alert to the needs of youth, she exerted a wholesome influence, taught in the Sunday school, and led her children,

¹⁷ Church Records, WMS Secretary's Book, 1932.

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Arthur, Jr., and Gloria, to share fully in the life of the church. Lola Carroll is yet active in the WMS and supports the program of the church.

The WMS very early began a systematic arrangement for the placing of flowers in the church. Each year, by means of their "Flower List," the women have consistently provided a profusion of beautiful floral arrangements for the worship services. Foremost in contributing her extraordinary talent along these lines has been Emma Shepard Barham (Mrs. Robert Erle Barham). She has gained recognition for her work in planting beautiful flowers and shrubs about the church and parsonage grounds and, indeed, throughout the entire community. A woman with a "green thumb," she has succeeded in making beautiful the unlovely places and for more than forty years has brought brightness to the lives of others at Oak Ridge. Faithful to the church, she has given uninterrupted attention to the WMS, the Sunday school, and the BTU.

Life and Service

Minutes of the church reveal a striking absence of serious cleavages, internal dissension, and strife in the business meetings. In the early days, according to the custom of the times, a few individuals suffered exclusion from fellowship for what would seem—at least to the members today—to be trivial reasons. Most of the members who were excluded sought restoration and found it on the most charitable terms.

Whatever its failures and defects might have been—and they certainly existed—the fruitful witness of the church more than offset them. One of the many rewarding experiences of the church was the privilege of nurturing such a sensitive, promising young man as Toma H. Williams (1896-1920). The son of T. H. and Beulah Baker Williams, he grew up in the church and set an example by his inspiring com-

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mitment to its ideals. Educated for a teaching career, he felt called to the ministry; but in the midst of preparations for initiating his theological education, he was stricken with a fatal illness. The impact of his life yet lingers among the members of the congregation.

One secret of the church's spiritual power has been the midweek prayer service. An ancient and beloved institution, Oak Ridge Baptists have long cherished and jealously guarded this citadel of the faithful. Among the members who have continuously supported the prayer service, none has been more faithful than Myrtle Harkness Barham. Married to John Barham, who was also a member of the church and who died in 1935, "Miss Myrtle" has served as a Sunday school teacher and as clerk of the church. For many years prior to her recent retirement, she worked as a mail carrier on an RFD route out of the Oak Ridge post office. Upon the death of her sister, Clara H. White, she assumed the care of her niece, Kate White, whom she reared in her home. Possessed of a manner marked by gentility, poise, and sincerity, Myrtle Barham's faith has been demonstrated by her works.

While the church has raised sizable sums of money to supply its needs in an expanding ministry, this has come about without embarrassing pressures exerted within the services or upon individuals. The church owes a lasting debt to William M. Nolan, son of Mollie S. and the late J. J. Nolan, for he has exercised his rare gifts as a fund raiser with the tact and insight designed to promote goodwill and harmony of feeling. William Nolan, long a deacon, served for a considerable time as church treasurer. He always responds cheerfully to the call to raise funds for special purposes. Nolan has been faithful in Sunday school work. He served for some years as a member of the Town Council. At the death of his father, he took charge of the family plan-

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tation and assumed heavy responsibilities in the care and education of a number of younger children in the family. Although his life has been marked by personal tragedy—he lost two of his three sons, one of them a high school senior—he has inspired others by his courage and fidelity.

During the three decades following the erection of the present sanctuary, the church felt the withering blows of World War I, the Flood of 1927, and the Great Depression of the thirties. Undaunted by the obstacles and fortified by its heritage, Oak Ridge Baptist Church felt confident that the seed long planted had fallen on good soil. With quiet faith it kept a silent vigil; its reward was an abundant harvest. In the sweat of toil and the serenity of trust the congregation bound the sheaves and brought them to the Maker of all.

CHAPTER X

THE LINGERING GLORY

*And how sweetly Jesus whispers,
"Take the cross, thou need'st not fear,
For I've trod the way before thee,
And the glory lingers near."*

—Anonymous

WHILE the bitter effects of the Depression were still fresh in memory, the disruptions of World War II temporarily restrained the church in its march toward complete recovery. The acceleration of agricultural production swelled the population of Oak Ridge to 373, and that of the Fifth Ward to 3,968, in 1940. Notwithstanding, the war robbed the church of many of its youth, enrollment in the organizations suffered, and valuable leadership was lost. Although by 1950 the population of Oak Ridge had decreased to 287, and that of the Fifth Ward to 3,173, the return of the veterans and the renewed dedication of the congregation had brought fresh vitality to the church, and larger gains than ever were registered. As a result of parallel growth in the churches of the region, the association divided along geographical lines in 1945, and Oak Ridge Baptists became a part of Morehouse Association, comprised of churches in Morehouse Parish.

Progress in the Early Forties

When W. E. Davis accepted a call to become pastor of Oak Ridge Baptist Church in January, 1936, the salary for half-time service was fixed at \$60.00 per month.¹ With an annual budget of slightly less than \$1,200 and a membership

¹ Oak Ridge Baptist Church, Minute Book II, Minutes, January 26, 1936.

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of a few less than 100, total gifts of the church in that year amounted to a little more than \$1,300. By 1946 the church membership had climbed to only 106, but total contributions amounted to more than \$3,000 that year.

The developing educational program of the church had long pointed up the need for added facilities. Rooms built into either end of the sanctuary when it was erected had proved inadequate. Consequently, early in the 1940's the church made plans for the construction of an educational annex. Edna Reese Conger, the church treasurer, began the collection of funds. Experienced at this task, she had often canvassed the membership for the necessary church expenses and always found a ready response to her appeals. Her husband, A. B. Conger, Jr., serves as a church trustee and has consistently given encouragement. Many of the church youth who were engaged in military service sent funds regularly, an enduring testimony of their deep love and of the spiritual impact the church had made upon their lives. Constructed by H. C. McDaniel, the annex contained rest rooms and provided assembly space and quarters for social gatherings. McDaniel, a skilled craftsman, has long been a member of the church and has supported the work with unflagging interest.

More adequate facilities encouraged the growth of the church organizations. The BTU, with Roy V. Norman as director, reported an active Story Hour, an organization geared to the needs of young children, as a part of its program in 1942. Norman, after his return from service in World War II, resumed direction of the BTU, which had an enrollment of twenty-seven in 1946. In that year the Sunday school had sixty-nine enrolled.

Full-Time Church

In the wake of a phenomenal post-war growth, the church

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ordained several young men to serve as deacons. Led by an able pastor, Paul Morgan, these young men, a number of them veterans, were ordained in 1947.² Gifted with a progressive outlook, the young deacons inspired the church to lift its vision to broader horizons. One of them, Clarke McRae Williams, eventually became chairman of the deacon body, a position which he now holds. Married to the former Mary Kathryn Lee, he is president and manager of an independent telephone company, which operates several exchanges, including the one at Oak Ridge. Williams serves with the trustees of both the church and cemetery, teaches a Sunday school class, and is active in BTU work. He recently became mayor of Oak Ridge.

Acting upon a recommendation of the deacons, the church saw the need for a full-time program and unanimously endorsed the venture early in 1949.³ The pastor's salary was fixed at \$250 monthly; the budget was raised from \$2,000 to \$3,815 annually. On March 7, 1949, the church called Loyd Lane as full-time pastor.⁴ After securing temporary housing for the pastor, plans were projected for the construction of an adequate new parsonage.

Parsonage

Interest in the movement for a new parsonage rose sharply when Mr. and Mrs. Jesse E. Wood, Sr., contributed \$3,000 for the project. Although this couple lived at Oak Ridge only a short time, their Christian devotion and generosity won for them a permanent place in the hearts of Oak Ridge Baptists. The parsonage, in part, stands as a monument to them. By the summer of 1949 the church had accumulated

² *Ibid.*, March 16, 1947.

³ *Ibid.*, February 16, 1949.

⁴ *Ibid.*, March 7, 1949.

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more than \$4,000 in its building fund. As a site for the new parsonage, Robert Erle Barham, Jr., donated a spacious lot measuring 300 feet by 80 feet.⁵ Plans and specifications were drawn up by F. Earl Hogan, Jr., a graduate engineer, who later rendered a similar service when extensive renovations and additions were made to the church building. He now serves as a deacon and BTU director.

Named chairman of the building committee, F. E. Hogan began work on the parsonage immediately, securing valuable assistance from members of his committee. Especially helpful were Dorothy W. Barham, Marion T. Files, R. C. Hathcox, and H. C. McDaniel. The handsome parsonage, consisting of six rooms and two baths, was completed and occupied early in 1950. Carrying out a tradition of the church, the project was finished without any indebtedness. Total cost of the house amounted to \$10,000.

Growth of the Organizations

Physical improvements added new incentive to the growth of the organizations, but perhaps a more important reason for their growth appeared in the custom of placing responsibility upon the more youthful members of the church. Youthful leaders came to maturity with a sense of obligation, which was easily transferred to their own children. At an early age Edna Nolan learned to take her place as church pianist; Elbie Nolan taught as a young girl in the Sunday school. Margaret Norman and Sadie Barham developed an increasingly deep devotion to the youth of the church through early and long service as workers in the Sunday school and youth organizations. William S. Barham accepted ordination as a deacon in 1947, served some time as church clerk, and assumed responsibilities on important committees because he had always worked in the church.

⁵ *Ibid.*, August 3, 1949.



Top: The present church building where Oak Ridge Baptists worship.



Bottom: The parsonage erected by Oak Ridge Baptists in recent years.

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Robert Erle Barham, Jr., was ordained a deacon in 1947; he soon became Sunday school superintendent. The Sunday school under his guidance reached an enrollment of eighty and an average attendance of fifty-seven in 1950.⁶ Married to the former Louise Tatum, who has served actively in choir work and the various organizations, Barham is a merchant and now serves as Sunday school secretary.

Directed by Roy V. Norman, the BTU reported a new addition to its growing organization in 1950—a Baptist Adult Union. The new adult union had enrolled twelve. In 1951 the BTU had an enrollment of forty-six and an average attendance of twenty-six. Married to the former Alice Eldridge, Norman is an active deacon. Alice and Roy Norman work effectively in the Sunday school and assist with the preparations for the observance of the Lord's Supper.

When Gladys Taylor Smith (Mrs. J. C. Smith) served for several years as president of the WMS in the early fifties, the organization flourished with the addition of a new circle, the Business Women's Circle. The BWC now has an enrollment of sixteen. In 1951 the total enrollment of the WMU organizations reached forty-nine. In 1952 Gladys T. Smith announced to the church that the WMS had attained the Standard of Excellence. The Sunbeams, led by Louise T. Barham, had an average attendance of fifteen.⁷ Gladys Smith is popular with the church youth as a study course teacher.

Church Growth

Not the least measure of the church's growth has been its consistent missionary interest. The church often joined in community-wide Vacation Bible Schools.⁸ For a number of years the church provided transportation for the residents

⁶ Morehouse Association, *Minutes* 1950.

⁷ Church Minutes, III, April 9, 1952.

⁸ *Ibid.*, II, April 7, 1940; Church Bulletin, June 1, 1947.

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of outlying areas, in order that they might have opportunities to share its worship services. Historically, the congregation has felt a deep concern for the unfortunate and needy. In addition to the individual members of the congregation who have acted independently, the church has readily responded to the needs of distressed families. Myrtle H. Barham, church clerk, noted in the church Minutes at Christmas time, 1951, that Dorothy West Barham "gave the names of the families suggested" as recipients of Christmas boxes. A committee composed of Gladys R. Baker, Emma S. Barham, and Gussie R. Kennedy was selected "to pack the boxes," and Jack Nolan "volunteered to deliver them."⁹

Fortunate in the dedication of its officers, the church has achieved more accurate statistical reporting and precision of detail in the keeping of its records. Following her distinguished maternal ancestor, J. F. Madison, who also served as church clerk, Gussie Reese Kennedy kept the records of the church's business meetings and membership for some time and served actively in the various organizations. Her sons, William R. and Mack C. Kennedy, yet live at Oak Ridge and are members of the church.

In the late forties and early fifties the church enjoyed several stimulating revivals and a sharp increase in membership. A membership of 115 was reported in 1949, with substantial additions the next two years. The financial condition of the church improved remarkably. Expenditures for missions in 1950 amounted to \$622, while in the same year the total expenditures of the church for all purposes rose to the enormous total of \$15,555. Increasingly heavy book-keeping duties fell upon Marion Taylor Files (Mrs. James E. Files), who has served as church treasurer since 1949. She came to Oak Ridge as a public school teacher, and since

⁹ Church Minutes, III, December 5, 1951.

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1947 she has been postmaster at Oak Ridge. A woman of versatile skills, Marion Files is a Sunday school teacher and BTU secretary. She is active in the BWC as well as on various church committees. Genial, kind, and friendly, she is always ready to help others and is constantly called upon in every phase of church activities, never refusing to serve.

Physical Improvements

To the church's credit, it was not satisfied merely to rest upon its laurels, to boast of and admire its past achievements. Rather, the congregation ever looked for new and challenging projects. With such a will to work, little difficulty was encountered in finding an energetic, aggressive young pastor, who led the church to new and magnificent accomplishments. Charles Lee McCullin served the church as pastor from October, 1950, until December 31, 1952. The son of a Baptist minister, McCullin was born at Poland, Louisiana, on November 6, 1926. He was graduated from Louisiana College and the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, coming to Oak Ridge with his young bride, Dora Fleming McCullin.

Early in 1951, the attention of the church was called to the need for improvements in the annex. The result was the appointment of the following committee to look into the matter: F. E. Hogan, William S. Barham, William M. Nolan, and Clarke M. Williams.¹⁰ After approval came from the church, work began on the annex; but it was only the initial stage in a lengthy program of renovation and improvement of the church properties. In December of 1951 the church endorsed a plan for a modern new baptistry, while at about the same time approval came for the installation of attractive new windows and screens for the sanctuary. On January 9,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, March 7, 1951.

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1952, Dorothy West Barham offered to build a new room, an addition to the annex, to be used by the Beginners.¹¹ The church accepted the offer, and Dorothy West Barham, Hulda M. Hogan, and Margaret Norman Files were named to proceed with the work. Subsequently, contracts were let for complete renovation and redecoration of the sanctuary. Along with the men, the women of the church worked heroically for the completion of the project. In addition to Edna R. Conger, who raised funds for the improvement, Dorothy W. Barham, Lola B. Carroll, and Gladys T. Smith rendered significant service along with numerous others.¹² On July 6, 1952, appropriate services were held to celebrate the completion of this extensive work.¹³

Recent Growth

Physical improvements were not made by Oak Ridge Baptists at the expense of missions. Whereas Cooperative Program gifts in 1949 amounted to \$120, in 1951 they totaled \$366 and rose to \$600 in 1954. Total mission gifts in 1953 were \$1,009, while the total expenditures of the church reached \$8,268. In 1957 all church expenditures amounted to \$12,150. Although the church received twenty new members in 1951, seven of them by baptism, a total membership of only 125 was reported in 1953, a figure which has been substantially maintained since that time. Net losses in membership for the period, in spite of regular additions, resulted from the organization of Horseshoe Baptist Church in 1952. Located in an adjacent community, where it existed for a considerable period as a mission, Horseshoe properly received into its fellowship a number of Baptists formerly affiliated with Oak Ridge, since they resided in that locality.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, III, January 9, 1952.

¹² *Ibid.*, April 9-16, 1952.

¹³ *Ibid.*, June 4, 1952; Church Bulletin, June 22, 1952.

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Oak Ridge Baptists offered every encouragement to this new church and have been delighted with its progress and prosperity.

The church organizations have kept pace with the progressive tempo of the church. Since 1951, Jack Nolan has served as Sunday school superintendent. A deacon, son of Mollie S. and the late J. J. Nolan, he has participated regularly in the BTU and readily offers his services wherever needed. His wife, Catherine, has supported him with equal enthusiasm, working as a leader in the BTU. In 1957 the Sunday school enrollment reached eighty-five, with an average attendance of forty-nine. Nolan found strong allies in his faithful corps of teachers, among whom Sadie Barham Files (Mrs. T. O. Files, Jr.) served for many years with special valor as a teacher of the younger children. The daughter of Lillian Pipes and the late Thomas Eugene Barham, she is a favorite of the church's younger set and has contributed of her talents in promoting the church's youth programs. One of her daughters, Linda Dale, although only recently graduated from high school, has worked for a number of years with the Sunday school Beginners, whose love she elicits spontaneously.

For several years in the early fifties Mrs. J. L. Whithorne served as BTU director. Presently working as church clerk, she is active in the BAU and assumes a variety of responsibilities in the WMS. Mrs. Walter Gee also served for a time as director of the BTU, while her daughter Mary Margaret acted as leader of the Junior Union. In 1957 the BTU had an enrollment of thirty-five.

Ably led in recent years by Mrs. J. H. Cooper, Mrs. C. S. Tatum, and Edna R. Conger, the WMS has found steady support in such stalwarts as Emma S. Barham, Gladys R. Baker, Gladys T. Smith, Gertrude K. Smith, and numerous others. The BWC, which meets in the evening hours, has

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attracted a large number of the women who are employed and has proved popular with the younger married set.

Active in the BWC, Margaret Norman Files (Mrs. Jack M. Files) has also gained esteem as a loyal friend of the church youth. The daughter of Blanche L. and the late P. P. Norman, she has served for many years as teacher of the Sunday school Beginners. For a considerable period she sponsored the Intermediates in the BTU, and she has labored diligently as one of the church organists. Her home has often been the gay center for delightful gatherings of the younger set.

Others who have rendered valuable service to, and won the respect of, the church youth include W. P. Smith, principal of the local high school, and his wife, Jeri Gardner Smith. They sponsored the Intermediates in the BTU and have served on the teaching staff of the Sunday school. Smith, recently elected a member of the Town Council, is an able school administrator and is very popular in the community. His wife renders a needed service in the church choir and participates in the BWC. Smith serves as a deacon.

Another public school teacher, Elbie Nolan Brown, now sponsors the Intermediates in the BTU. The daughter of Mollie S. and the late J. J. Nolan, she taught in the Sunday school for many years and has wisely invested her dramatic skills and talents as a leader in the church youth, who hold her in highest esteem. Her own children, Jimmy and Nancy Kay, have been reared in the church, and they serve capably in the various organizations.

Additional Improvements

After the completion of a modern new baptistry—a project dear to the hearts of the F. E. Hogans—the church authorized Hogan to proceed with the installation of a baptistry water heater, funds for which had been donated early in

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1953.¹⁴ At an impressive service held on May 10, 1953, the first candidates were baptized in the new baptistry. They were Jimmy Brown, Nancy Kay Brown, Mary Allen Files, Annette Johnson, Tommy Gene Johnson, and Jacky Nolan.¹⁵

In the summer of 1953, Erle M. Barham successfully conducted a fund-raising campaign which resulted in the addition of a new room to the parsonage, to be used as a study.¹⁶ Members of the building committee included Dorothy W. Barham, F. E. Hogan, and Clarke M. Williams.¹⁷ Under the guidance of Myrtle H. Barham, Marion T. Files, and Dorothy W. Barham, who donated the funds, the parsonage interior was completely redecorated in 1956.¹⁸ In 1957 the church authorized F. E. Hogan, W. M. Nolan, Marion T. Files, and Dorothy W. Barham to serve as a committee to add a utility room and carport to the parsonage.¹⁹ The exterior of the parsonage was redecorated and the driveway hard-surfaced. The parsonage, which now has eight rooms and two baths, is valued at \$20,000.

Lillian Pipes Barham initiated the movement to purchase an organ for the church when she began a fund for the purpose, making a liberal gift in the early summer of 1956.²⁰ The following October the church authorized committees to proceed with the organ project. Edna R. Conger, Marion T. Files, and W. M. Nolan were named on the finance committee, while the committee to recommend a selection consisted of Myrtle H. Barham, Lillian P. Barham, Ernestine C. Hathcox, Gladys T. Smith, and W. P. Smith. Within less than a month the church had installed and paid for a handsome

¹⁴ Church Minutes, III, February 11, 1953.

¹⁵ Church Bulletin, May 17, 1953.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, July 12, 1953.

¹⁷ Church Minutes, III, June 10-July 8, 1953.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, March 4, 1953; December 7, 1955; Church Bulletin, January 20, 1957.

¹⁹ Church Minutes, III, January 9, 1957.

²⁰ Church Bulletin, July 22, 1956.

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electric organ—a two-manual church model—at a cost of almost \$3,000.²¹

Other projects completed in recent years include the purchase of office equipment, installation of ceiling fans in the annex, the redecoration of the church exterior, the remodeling of the front entrances to the church, and hardsurfacing of the driveways. The total valuation of the church property is now \$50,000.²²

Throughout the period spanning practically the last half-century, improvements made and the progress realized by Oak Ridge Baptists incalculably meshed with heavy responsibilities willingly assumed by Dorothy West Barham. Becomingly modest, she manifests a cultural affinity which identifies her with the best ladyhood of the Old South, while her generosity has allied her with the most progressive movements in the community. She built a Boy Scout hut, largely single-handedly equipped the Community Center, and justly received the community's first Good Citizenship Award. Her keen intellect, business acumen, and charitable inclinations have not deflected her chief glory, for she excels as a homemaker, as a planter of trees and flowers, and she takes great delight in her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. As a Christian and church member, she has set a good example, seldom even missing the mid-week prayer service.

Church Activities

A schedule of activities has been designed by the church with two underlying considerations in view: the demands of the common life and the realization that the church is only a small-town church having few members and a relatively small attendance. Much concerned with weevils, worms, and weather, the sequences of a friendly, slow, and easy plan-

²¹ Church Minutes, III, October 10-November 6, 1956.
²² Morehouse Association, *Minutes* 1958.

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tation life are sometimes broken by tenant quarrels and fights, which often force the planters to act as arbiters. On some occasions the sanctuary is distressingly bare, when several of the members feel constrained to visit out-of-town relatives. But there are bright days, such as when several pews are required for Gladys Baker's visiting children and their families—Everett, Reese, Hugh, Betty Lou, John Loyd, and Ben Edwards.

Attendance uncertainties make difficult any planned musical programs, a problem with which choir directors have wrestled interminably. In spite of inherent weaknesses and manifest handicaps in this work, a number of leaders have labored heroically. Mrs. Wayland D. Baugh served for a considerable period as choir director. Useful as a Sunday school teacher and BTU leader, she succeeded in presenting many creditable performances by the choir, with which she worked tirelessly. In these efforts she has been ably assisted by her daughter Joy, by Gertrude Kennedy Smith, and others.

A spirit of warm fellowship has characterized the various church activities. Quite spontaneously and without prior announcement, for example, Emma S. Barham and her son R. E., Jr., entertained the prayer meeting group with refreshments of cold watermelon following the service on Wednesday night, July 22, 1953.²³ For a time the church experimented with periodic Family Nights at the mid-week prayer meeting hour. Now, the church enjoys a quarterly fellowship supper, at which the families and friends of the members sample the assortment of covered dishes and home-cooked delicacies while engaging in friendly conversation with their neighbors. The warmth of the fellowship is accentuated when old friends of the church drop in for a renewal of ties. No friends receive more enthusiastic greetings than Dr. B. M.

²³ Church Bulletin, July 26, 1953.

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McKoin and his devoted wife, "Miss Enid," or Gertrude Ferm Nordstrom.

As a means of expediting a well-rounded calendar of activities, the church selected the following committee in 1955: Erle M. Barham, Marion T. Files, F. E. Hogan, W. M. Nolan, Gertrude K. Smith, and Clarke M. Williams.²⁴ A number of exceptional church activities resulted from the work of this committee. Particularly outstanding were the activities designed to attract the youth of the church.

Youth Activities

The effectiveness of the church's teaching ministry has been demonstrated in the willingness of its youth to serve whenever called upon; their cooperation in every challenging venture has been an inspiration. Through the years the church was fortunate in numbering among its members a choice group of talented young ladies who, prior to their departure for college, assumed increasingly useful roles as church musicians. In recent years Susan Smith, daughter of Ernest B. and Gertrude K. Smith, served a lengthy term as church pianist, although her faithfulness to the task exacted from her a trip of several miles, often under difficult conditions. More recently, Nancy Lillian Files, daughter of Thomas O. Files, Jr., and Sadie Barham Files, served with distinction as church organist. Later, Roxie Grace Greene accepted this position.

In order to correlate and give direction to the youth activities, the church set up a special committee in the fall of 1954. It was comprised of the following: Mrs. W. D. Baugh, Elbie N. Brown, Margaret N. Files, and Sadie B. Files.²⁵ Directed by Margaret N. Files, the church youth often took

²⁴ *Ibid.*, April 17, 1955.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, September 26, 1954.

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charge of the prayer service in the absence of the pastor.²⁶ Earlier, the church had purchased recreation equipment. Supervised recreational activities often provided social hours to which the youth of the community received invitations.²⁷ The church entertained the youth of the community prior to the departure of the college students in the fall of 1957, when about forty persons enjoyed the barbecued chicken.²⁸

Much attention has been given to study courses, which have been designed in such manner as to appeal to the youth, who have participated with extraordinary enthusiasm. The church has made every effort to provide opportunities for its youth to share in the benefits of church-sponsored summer camps. These experiences have proved especially rewarding, since the youth have returned with broader vision and readiness to serve. The church feels justified in its investments in youth as it sees Jimmy Brown, Jacky Nolan, Jerry Prince Greene, and others so eager to assist in receiving the tithes and offerings at the Sunday evening services.

A series of special services attractive to the youth was held in the summer of 1955. Beginning in the early evening with forum discussions, followed by the evening meal and a period of recreation, the services were concluded with a worship hour to which the public was invited.²⁹ The following spring the church initiated a Youth Week observance, during which the youth assumed the various offices of the church and conducted its activities for the week. Assisted by W. P. Smith, the youth presented a program centering around Christian education. John Edward Reese, having a Christian zeal reminiscent of his illustrious maternal ancestor, John Flood Madison, served as pastor for the week. His

²⁶ *Ibid.*, July 24, 1955.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, November 21, 1954.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, September 8, 1957.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, June 26-July 3, 1955.

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assistant was Norman Lewis Files.³⁰ The son of Jack M. and Margaret Norman Files, Norman Lewis Files died in March, 1957, following a lengthy illness. He was a youth only nineteen years of age, and his death deeply affected the church and community. Gifted with many-faceted talents, religiously inclined, he evidenced his Christian commitment in an ever-eager readiness to serve in the church whenever called upon.

Unusually effective programs have been presented by the church youth in recent years at the Christmas season. Watch Night services on New Year's Eve have been especially attractive. Much favorable comment was evoked from the church membership when the students displayed extraordinary talent in their Student Night at Christmas programs. Students from the Baugh, Brown, Gee, and T. O. Files families participated, as well as Roxie and Glen Lee Greene, Jr., Joe Wayne Johnston, and Edward Reese.³¹ Joe Wayne Johnston, grandson of the late Jesse E. Norris, has been a valuable worker in the various church youth groups.

Spiritual Growth

A growing participation in the church life by the youth reflects the continuing emphasis upon Christian nurture in the home, an emphasis which has had no little effect in the winning of the children. Likewise, the Sunday school has been an equally important factor. Chandler Ferm Barham, daughter of Joseph West and Elizabeth Nordstrom Barham, who was baptized on May 5, 1957, has regularly attended Sunday school.³² Vernon Norman, son of Roy V. and Alice E. Norman, became a member of the church in 1958, while the children of Clarke and Mary Kathryn Williams, Clarke

³⁰ *Ibid.*, March 25, 1956.

³¹ *Ibid.*, December 29, 1957.

³² *Ibid.*, May 12, 1957.

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McRae, Jr., and Annette, were also baptized recently—all of them first learning about the church in their Christian homes and in the Sunday school.

The church's spiritual growth is seen again in the development of its manpower. Relatively few of the men feel disinclined to make a public address in the church, and most of them are willing to lead in public prayer. Clarke M. Williams frequently takes charge of a service on short notice. He has served for some years as chairman of the church's budget committee and readily undertakes minor repair jobs at the church or parsonage as he sees the need. Erle McKoin Barham, son of Dorothy West and the late Dr. B. E. Barham, is another whose talents are often freely used as the pastor finds occasion to be out of town. For a number of years the respected teacher of the men's Sunday school class, he is a successful planter and served for some time as a member of the State Parks and Recreation Commission. Widely known in conservation and game management circles, he was a prime mover in the establishment of a local game preserve. He serves as chairman of the church trustees.

The men's Sunday school class has been a strong factor in the development of the men for wider spiritual service. Among the men who have readily led prayer service or participated in special programs presented by the men are W. P. Smith, James E. Files, Jr., and Joseph W. Barham. Jimmy Files, son of James E. and Marion Taylor Files, was reared in the church and learned early to assume the varied responsibilities connected with the church organizations. Now employed in the banking field, he recently related to the prayer meeting group his experiences as a lieutenant in military service while stationed in Alaska. Joseph West Barham, son of Dorothy West and the late Dr. B. E. Barham, manages the family's extensive farming operations. A university graduate with a major in commerce, he is widely

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known in southern agricultural circles and has been the recipient of numerous honors in the field. Often called upon to render service in connection with the business affairs of the church, he performs with equal facility as a Sunday school teacher or speaker at one of the church services. He also serves as a deacon.

A program which was initiated by the men, one that has attracted much favorable comment in the church, is the annual Thanksgiving service, when the men honor the college students.³³ A feature of the program has been the presentation of gifts to the students and a gift to the young lady who has served as church organist. Arranged and presented entirely by the men, the programs have been inspiring, marked by originality, and warmly received.

Admiral Eugene Alexander Barham is typical of the church's spiritual vitality and represents its historic love of liberty, belief in the inculcation of patriotism, and willingness to bear arms in a righteous cause. The son of Lillian Pipes and the late Thomas Eugene Barham, he was graduated from the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis in 1935. During World War II, he served on destroyers in the Pacific Fleet, assuming his first command in 1943. With the onset of the Korean conflict, he was called to Staff duty with the Commander of Naval Forces, Far East, and later commanded a Destroyer Division in the Mediterranean. In his last tour of duty before retirement, he served as Commander of the Fleet Air Defense Training Center at Virginia Beach. He was retired in 1958 with the rank of Rear Admiral. Awarded the Bronze Star, with the Gold Star in lieu of a second award, Admiral Barham also received a Commendation Medal, a Presidential Unit Citation, and various Campaign Medals. Baptized in 1921, he has continued to main-

³³ *Ibid.*, November 24, 1957.

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tain his membership in the church. He now manages the family's plantations and participates actively in the church, serving as a popular speaker when called upon. He serves as chairman of the cemetery trustees.

Christian Life and Worship

Carrying on its traditions are several families that have been represented in the church for more than 100 years, including the Barham, Conger, and Williams families. The present members who have the longest records of membership include Robert Erle Barham, Lillian Pipes Barham, Annie Kennedy Hamby, and Mollie Stokes Nolan. On April 6, 1958, the children of Samuel P. and Evelyn Gibbs Williams—Philip, Kathleen, and Marilyn Rose—were baptized.³⁴ They represent the fifth generation of the Williams family to be identified with the church, having descended paternally from John and Elizabeth Wooding Williams. Sam Williams is the son of Maude Wright and the late Burgess B. Williams, both of whom united with the church. Sam Williams serves as a trustee of the church.

Robert J. Barham was baptized on March 29, 1959.³⁵ Born on January 25, 1949, he is the son of Erle McKoin and Rosalie Smith Barham. The latest of the fifth generation of the Barham family to unite with the church, his paternal ancestors include Thomas Nathanael and Sallie Barham, William Thomas and Ada Barham, and Dr. Ben Edwards and Dorothy West Barham.

Oak Ridge Baptists have grown into an appreciation of a moderately formal worship service—one that is neither so formal the people are lost nor so confused the good Lord is lost. They have thus adopted an order of service designed to chart a somewhat vague, if not perilous, course between

³⁴ *Ibid.*, April 13, 1958.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, April 5, 1959.

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the Scylla of a spiritually bankrupt formalism and the Charybdis of inanity, while attempting at the same time to restrict to a minimum that admittedly vacuous area of non-communication almost certainly present for some on every level of worship. A typical Sunday morning worship service follows this order:

Organ Prelude
Call to Worship—"The Lord Is in His Holy Temple"
Silent Prayer—Invocation
Choral Response—The Gloria Patri
Hymn
Announcements
Responsive Reading
Pastoral Prayer
Hymn
Worship with Tithes and Offerings
The Doxology
Prayer of Dedication
Special Music or Hymn
The Sermon
Hymn
Benediction
Choral Response—"Hear Our Prayer, O Lord"
Organ Postlude ³⁸

The natural independence of the planters and the Baptist emphasis upon individualism have sometimes conspired to evoke comment from outside that the church is "different." In its theological orientation, however, the church clings fundamentally to the established norms of Christian orthodoxy, leaving with those who pass through its doors a gentle hint of Calvinism. Its "liberalism" is confined largely to a single area: leaving with the minister—who sets the terms of his spiritual services—the matter of his personal tastes, without meddlesome interference. Likewise, members of the congregation—especially the youth—in turn are presumed to have

³⁸ *Ibid.*, January 3, 1960.

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intelligence and Christianity enough to decide about their innocent pastimes without the necessity of employing detectives to prevent their becoming delinquents, degenerates, or debauchees.

Facing the Future

Oak Ridge Baptists reflect upon their past with justifiable pride, but their faith in the future matches that of their forbears. Projects which have been left for future completion include a social and recreational hall to be erected in memory of Norman Lewis Files.³⁷ There has been some speculation among members that the church may eventually operate a school. Some members are in favor of the construction and operation of a home for the aged. These projects will doubtless challenge the dedication and vision of the membership during the years ahead.

Such a challenge is coupled with the reassurance of God's help. The pastor's Christmas message to the church in 1957 said in part:

Again the carols! And again the whole world pauses before a manger-cradle to sing the old and ever-new glad tidings that God Incarnate has spoken to men. At Christmas as always God confronts us.

Not the least rewarding nor revealing of the many aspects of this season is its inspiration and challenge to self-scrutiny, a long neglected facet of experimental Christianity. Such neglect is paradigmatic of our time.

Coming to our aid is memory, the mind's wonderful microscope, facilitating a review of the past year's events. They include both joys and sorrows, disappointments and triumphs, for one cannot remain forever on an escalator.

This reality, for the Christian, brings a fresh awareness of faith, the mind's wonderful telescope, and accentuates our surest resource against futility. Is not his name Emmanuel—God is with us?³⁸

³⁷ Church Minutes, III, December 7, 1955; April 11, 1957.

³⁸ Church Bulletin, December 22, 1957.

BAPTISTS OF OAK RIDGE

It has been 163 years since John Coulter first proclaimed the gospel in a vast wilderness which became Oak Ridge. Today, after 163 years of unbroken witness, Oak Ridge Baptists stand on the threshold of the future, as did John Coulter, unafraid. They take up again the Cross of Christ, knowing that his glory lingers near.

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